

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 20, 2005** **8:00 p.m.**

Date: 05/04/20

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order. The committee has before it estimates for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. As per our standing order the first hour will be allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member who wishes to participate will be able to do so.

Hon. members, before we proceed with the estimates, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this evening a group of cadets from the 2836 RCAC squadron. They are seated in the public gallery, and they are led tonight by the officer in charge, Officer Cadet Jeff Johnson, and the NCO in charge, Corporal Stefan Strangman. I would ask that they please rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Main Estimates 2005-06**

Sustainable Resource Development

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, colleagues. I'm pleased to be here tonight to talk about the Sustainable Resource Development 2005-06 budget.

I'd like to take a moment to introduce our staff from my department who have accompanied me here tonight and are sitting in the members' gallery. We have Jamie Curran, my executive assistant; Brad Pickering, my deputy minister; his officials Stew Churlish, assistant deputy minister, strategic corporate services and senior financial officer; Craig Quintilio, our assistant deputy minister of public lands and forests; Cliff Henderson, assistant deputy minister of the forest protection division; Jerry Sunderland, acting assistant deputy minister for strategic forestry initiatives; Ken Ambrock, assistant deputy minister of fish and wildlife; Lesley Chenier-Aussant, manager of policy and planning; Joan McCracken, our assistant director of communications, who has done an excellent job in putting together our business plan and making sure that our notes tonight correspond with that business plan; and Paul Leeder, executive assistant to the deputy minister.

These are just a few of the folks and a handful of our 1,900 dedicated and professional staff who work in Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. Each and every day our people do excellent work that helps improve the quality of life in Alberta's communities. I'm proud that SRD staff are well known and respected by Albertans. They do an outstanding job day in and day out, and I commend them for the excellent work that they do.

Sustainable Resource Development has an important and far-reaching mandate. It's our job to ensure that Alberta's natural resources are sustained and properly managed for the benefit of future generations. To do this, we have to strike the right balance between conservation and development, and that means taking into consideration the economic, social, and environmental values of all Albertans. Important management decisions are based on these principles.

The ministry has key responsibility areas which, broken down in their simplest manner, are forestry, which looks after wildfires, timber allocations, et cetera; land, rangeland management, disposition management plans, et cetera; wildlife, fisheries, habitat management, et cetera; and quasi-judicial boards, the Natural Resources Conservation Board, the Surface Rights Board, and the Land Compensation Board.

The ministry continues to face a number of challenges in delivering its services, among them responding to increased pressure on the land base as a result of our booming economy, minimizing the industrial footprint, protecting critical wildlife habitats and increasing stewardship efforts, responding to increased demand for more resource managers. These are just a few of the difficult challenges we face heading into Alberta's next century. Albertans can be assured that my department will continue to deliver top-quality services that contribute to balanced and sustainable management of Alberta's natural resources. We want Albertans to feel proud about the incredible natural resources in this province and confident in the way they're being managed.

Budget 2005 will help us build on excellent work that has already been done. The department's 2005-06 proposed operating budget has been increased by about \$20 million. The additional funding is great news not only for the department, but it's also great news for Albertans. We are targeting the money to Albertans' top priorities. It's something that they've been telling us for the past few years.

In terms of manpower one of these priorities is manpower. For a number of years Albertans have told us that they want to see greater department presence when they are enjoying the great outdoors. Some have expressed particular concern about the number of fish and wildlife officers and the number of people in the backcountry. I'm happy that the department is now in the position of addressing these concerns.

Money has been set aside in our 2005 budget to hire a range of new staffing, including up to 10 new fish and wildlife officers. This will help support all aspects of our wildlife management programs, including problem wildlife and illegal harvest. Five fish and wildlife staff will carry out important public outreach and education initiatives, and six biologists and one caribou/grizzly bear manager will conduct important scientific research that will help address the growing pressures facing Alberta's wildlife populations. We will also look at five permanent fisheries staff, who will conduct important fisheries inventories to ensure healthy fish stocks in addition to assisting with fisheries management.

We're also going to be looking at 16 seasonal forest guardians, who will help address the pressures of increased recreational use of public lands. We will use these guardians to educate the public about our respect the land stewardship program. So we'll have upwards of 40 front-line staff at the community level, and that's good news for Albertans.

Fish and wildlife. A key business of our ministry is the management of our fish and wildlife resources. Many Albertans have a deep-seated connection with this wonderful natural resource as it provides more than just personal enjoyment. It's their livelihood and a means to provide for their family. Alberta's fish and wildlife populations support more than 20,000 jobs in Alberta and generate

in excess of \$1 billion a year to our provincial economy. We recognize the importance of this valuable natural resource and the importance of ensuring that it's managed for sustainability over the long term.

Over the last year I've heard from a number of Albertans about the province's grizzly bear and caribou habitats, and I can say with certainty that Alberta Sustainable Resource Development is responsibly managing these wildlife populations.

Grizzly bears. In terms of grizzly bears there is more on-the-ground management in Alberta than ever before, including an ongoing DNA-based population census that will give us a more accurate picture of Alberta's grizzly bear population. It is incredibly difficult to estimate grizzly bear population numbers. They hibernate through the winter and roam over hundreds of square kilometres the rest of the year. Despite these challenges, we've been doing good work and a good job, and Alberta is internationally recognized for being a leader in grizzly bear research.

We've taken a leading role in protecting and preserving sensitive caribou populations. We've been at the table on a number of committees that have helped lead the caribou recovery team, and to protect caribou habitat, the department chose to rule out permanent timber allocations north of the Chinchaga and reduce the annual allowable cut in the E8 forest management unit by 30 per cent. We've also brought industry on-board by requiring caribou protection plans as a condition of operation. Over the last few years upwards of \$1 million has been committed by government and industry toward monitoring and researching initiatives, more research and industry co-operation than any other jurisdiction, I might add, Mr. Chairman, and through Budget 2005 we will continue to support the long-term conservation of Alberta caribou and grizzly bear habitats.

We're setting aside an additional funding of approximately \$600,000 to increase monitoring, research population inventories, and map habitats. This important work will help strengthen our understanding of Alberta's caribou and grizzlies and the pressure they face, and it is that knowledge that will help us refine our long-term planning goals to ensure the sustainability of these populations for generations to come.

In terms of species at risk the department also continues to make significant progress in support of Alberta's species at risk. Over the last year Sustainable Resource Development supported 14 recovery teams and over 16 stewardship, research, monitoring, and sampling projects. A draft woodland caribou recovery plan has been developed and is being reviewed by the department, and we will continue to commit in 2005, by setting aside an additional \$130,000, to fund species-at-risk projects.

8:10

In terms of fisheries to improve our ability to manage Alberta's fishing resources, the department will commit an additional \$2 million to our fisheries program. This money will help strengthen our fisheries population inventories and monitoring. It will also improve fisheries habitat, support the province's fish stocking program and disease testing, and implement the commercial fisheries rationalization program that was started. So far, the move to reduce the number of commercial fishing licences has been very successful. Since we began the program, the number of commercial operators has been reduced from 800 to around 200.

Métis harvesting. While on the topic of fish and wildlife I'd like to take a moment to touch on another important issue facing the department. Following a federal court ruling, the Alberta government entered into a harvesting agreement for Métis residents to hunt and fish for subsistence purposes. The issue has caused concern

among many Albertans, particularly conservation groups and sport hunting and fishing organizations. The department is taking their concerns very seriously, and we will continue to monitor fish and wildlife populations to watch for any impact upon these resources. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is the lead department on this agreement, and they will continue to work with Métis leaders to educate Métis about their responsibilities as well.

In terms of education it's an important part of responsible resource management. Talking to people, engaging them on the issues that we face, is critically important, especially when it comes to managing Alberta's fish and wildlife resources. These are shared resources that require the co-operation of all Albertans to ensure their long-term sustainability. The department recognizes this and is committed to an additional half a million dollars toward educating Albertans about hunting and fishing issues and regulations. The money will help cover on-the-ground outreach initiatives in regions all across the province. The need for education is increasing every year. Last year over 201,000 sport-fishing licences were sold, and nearly 100,000 hunters purchased over 261,000 hunting licences, an increase of 2,700 hunters over the year before. Despite the increasing pressure our fish and wildlife officers continue to do an outstanding job, in addition to the hunting licences and fishing licences that are out there.

Over the past year we have been working on a number of priority projects, like the West Nile virus monitoring program and the chronic wasting disease survey.

Forestry is another priority area for the department. The Alberta forest industry is a significant contributor to the economy of this great province, with at least 50 Alberta communities being participants. The industry provides more than 50,000 jobs for Albertans and generates about \$1.4 billion in household income.

Unfortunately, it's an industry at risk. The mountain pine beetle has the potential to devastate the Alberta forest industry. In B.C. the beetle has infested more than 14 million hectares of trees and cost the B.C. forest industry about \$9 billion. As soon as the department identified the risk these beetles can pose to the Alberta forest industry, we took immediate action. We imposed a ban on the transportation of wood bark across the border between Alberta and B.C., and we continue vigorously to enforce this ban through weigh station operators who conduct truck checks and in the handling of firewood by campground operators and campers.

Through education we get the message out to Albertans from the ground up. We have expanded our surveillance and reporting programs to include the general public. Now Albertans can report mountain pine beetle cases through our eye in the sky program. We've also been working extensively with Kananaskis Country, with Parks Canada to identify and fight the spread of these forest pests. So far, our proactive approach has paid off. We've been able to cut and burn affected stands of trees before the beetle has had a chance to spread beyond our control.

We must not be complacent. The outbreak in B.C. poses a very immediate and serious threat to Alberta forests. Right now the mountain pine beetle is set to strike our mature forests along the eastern slopes. In fact, cases have recently been reported in Jasper and Banff, and every day the beetle is moving closer to the border near the Willmore wilderness area. Through Budget 2005 the department will step up its efforts to take immediate action to stop the beetle at the border, and we're allocating an initial \$2.6 million towards strengthening, preventing, and detecting our control efforts.

Value-added strategy. The department is also committed to ensuring the long-term sustainability of our timber industry. We will continue to build upon our relationship with the industry to work towards ensuring this renewable resource is utilized to its fullest

potential. In Budget 2005 we've earmarked \$600,000 towards promoting forest products and market diversification. This money will go to strengthening our value-added strategy. To help us along, we're entering into a strategic partnership with Forintek, the national wood products research and development organization. Ultimately, we want to take a value-added approach that focuses on a higher dollar return for every tree that's cut.

Reforestation. To ensure the sustainability of our timber resources, the department is committing \$1.5 million a year for the next three years to reforestation. The Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta is very successful delegating administrative organizations that promote responsible reforestation activities on behalf of small commercial operators with permits less than 10,000 cubic metres. It has three core programs: the forest resource improvement program, the wildfire reclamation program, and the community timber program. The funding is to be used to do some catch-up reforestation of older cut blocks held by community timber program permit holders and small quota holders. While the specifics are still being worked out, the funding will be directed in the areas that have the greatest potential to be successfully reforested.

Softwood lumber. The industry continues to show its commitment to innovation and to the future of our forests despite challenges like the softwood lumber dispute. SRD will continue to work closely with our colleagues in government, other provinces, the federal government, and the industry to find workable solutions to that trade dispute.

Capital spending. While I'm on the topic of forests, I'd like to take a moment to highlight capital spending that's been allocated to the department. Money will go toward two projects that relate to the province's ability to fight wildfires. As you may recall, last year's fire season was particularly bad in the northern part of this province. All told, the department fought more than 1,600 wildfires, which burned nearly 235,000 hectares of land, an area more than three times the size of Edmonton.

Air tankers. To help us more effectively battle these wildfires, capital spending will be used to upgrade three provincially owned CL 215 air tankers. These are commonly known as water bombers. The plan is to spend \$28 million over two years, starting in 2006, to begin converting the plane's existing piston-powered engines to turbine power. These modifications will make the air tankers 32 per cent more effective and reduce maintenance costs. The conversion will also allow the airplanes to operate more effectively in higher altitudes and reload from a number of water bodies.

The second project involving upgrading for our firefighting is seven air tanker bases across the province: \$12 million, or \$24 million over three years, will be used to replace and expand the concrete and asphalt surfaces at these bases. The modifications are necessary to accommodate the weight and size of today's modern air tankers. Both of these projects are necessary to ensure that the department is well equipped to safely and effectively protect Albertans and their communities from wildfire.

Public lands. Each year the economy grows, and there continues to be an increased demand on Alberta's 100 million acres of public lands. A major priority for the department will continue to be the wise use of this land base. We've committed to a provincial land-use framework. Albertans have told us that they want to benefit from land today and tomorrow in a way that recognizes and adapts to the changing needs of the land base. We will work within government to flesh out this framework and create a sustainable land legacy where Albertans continue to live on the land, labour on the land, and leisure on the land. If the past is any indication, it's not going to be an easy task. In 2003-2004 the volume of dispositions on public land increased to more than 15,000 from 12,000 the year

before, an increase of 24 per cent. As demand increases, we need to develop and implement policies, guidelines, and practices that will help minimize the footprint on Crown land.

8:20

Access management. We're making some very good progress by working with the public and stakeholder groups on a number of access management plans. The Ghost-Waiparous operational plan, for example, is nearing completion, and we expect to begin implementation later this year. It takes a lot of consultation with a range of stakeholders to develop comprehensive management plans that are the right fit. I'm proud of the work that has been done to ensure that there is a balance between environmental protection and recreational opportunities for Albertans.

Agricultural dispositions. We will continue to explore new ways of providing stability to Alberta's farm and ranch operators who rely on Crown lands to do business. We continue to show innovation in management of grazing lands and integrated grazing with other land uses to help Alberta's farming communities. We are in our second year of successful legislation to balance the needs of recreational access to leased agricultural land, and we are committed to the latest in rangeland practices that ensure rangeland health and show environmental and economic benefits.

To ensure that we continue to deliver the best quality services to Albertans, the department will invest an additional \$1 million in our land management program, and we are committing \$1.75 million to a digital disposition mapping system that will help us improve our resource activity data as well as speed up the process.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure this evening to introduce to you and through you Dr. Barbara Lacey, a constituent from Lethbridge-East, a friend, and my former colleague on Lethbridge city council. She presently sits as a four-term alderman on city council. Dr. Barbara Lacey has played a very significant part in the water strategy of southern Alberta and presently serves as the chair of the Oldman River water basin council. I know that she follows with interest the Water for Life discussions. I'm sure that my fellow House member from Lethbridge-West joins me in expressing our welcome. I would ask that she rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Main Estimates 2005-06**

Sustainable Resource Development (*continued*)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to rise today to discuss the impact of this budget, which is Sustainable Resource Development. I'm actually amazed and I think the public should be amazed or, at least, horrified that we talk about millions and millions of dollars that we're supposed to come to an agreement

or an understanding on within about a two hour and 50 minute time frame. We're talking about the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development and their allocation request for \$230.1 million.

There's a lot that the minister and his staff have actually put forward in the first 20 minutes. I'd like to talk about specific breakdowns by core business and the difference from the request this year to the request that was there last year.

Wildfire management. Now, I know that we have the threat of fires that are increasing every year with regard to the dryness and the conditions. Right now I believe the ministry is asking for \$75.8 million. That's down \$130 million. This leads to the supplemental requests that we have every year. I don't know why we don't accurately request what we know we're going to be using. If we're going to be down about \$200 million, I think if we could come within a couple of hundred million, people would be a little bit more forgiving. But when we're lowballing it by \$130 million, I don't find that good government. I find that being in fact not accountable to the taxpayers whatsoever.

Natural resources and public land management. The request is \$130.7 million. That's an increase of \$28 million. Land, access, and compensation boards: that's only up \$0.9 million. As well, the ministry support services, which is up \$0.9 million. Environment statutory programs: the request is \$4.9 million. That's an increase of \$2.6 million. Then the adjustments and other provisions. It's, you know, quite insignificant there.

The first question, again, that I would ask the minister is: why the discrepancy of what they know is to be used and what they're actually asking for? Why the big difference with regard to the supplementary requests?

Can the minister go through line by line the government and lottery fund estimates that they get from the lottery funds, and can they table a document that explains each line item and identifies exactly which programs are funded through which line item?

Program 1, ministry support services: the budget for both ministries is increasing modestly by about \$20 million. Why is there new money being allocated to these offices, and what will the money be allocated for?

If we look at the human resources budget, it's being increased by almost \$100,000. The ministry is reporting no new increases to staff. The question would be: why is this money being allocated to the department? What will the extra money be used for in the upcoming year?

Moving on to the strategic corporate services budget, it's increasing by approximately \$383,000. Why does this line item require such an increase in funding, and what will the extra funds be used for?

These are some of the specifics, but they're not actually explained. They're embedded in there, and it's us as the opposition that are supposed to ask the questions with regard to these to find out the information that the public so dearly requires so we keep our accountability there.

The breakdown for \$809,000 in the minister's and the deputy minister's offices. I ask for the cards and the salaries for the permanent positions for the ministers, the deputy ministers, the chiefs of staff because as they're carrying on the duties on behalf of this ministry, I think it should be incumbent on them to be able to produce the receipts as to what exactly these deputy ministers and these department heads are in fact using that money for, the salaries of the permanent positions, salaries of the nonpermanent position people, salaries of the contracted positions as well as the travel expenses, the advertising, telephone, communications, and hosting expenses. I mean, we can go on. How much was spent on, you

know, bonuses for the previous year? What was the largest bonus given out, to who was it for, and what was it given for?

Moving on to program 2, wildfire management.

Mr. Dunford: This is estimates, not public accounts.

Mr. Bonko: Well, give me the information I ask for, and I won't have to go through the line by line item. Thank you for that, minister.

If we want to go to the firefighters, the ministry has asked for a supplementary request for approximately \$125 million. He's answered some of the questions for the upgrading of bombers, I'm assuming, with regard to new technologies to be able to take the water and be able to disperse it. But will some of that money be used to buy new equipment for the firefighters? I know that they're expected to pay room and board. I'm just wondering about new equipment. When these people put their heart and soul into it, are they going to be provided with the equipment to be able to fight the fires as well?

Why is the government expecting such a decrease in revenues in premiums, fees, and licences? The ministry budgeted and it shows that it's expecting to receive \$142 million in revenues from premiums, fees, and licences. Last year the minister took in \$172 million. Again, is it expecting a decrease, then, from the premiums, fees, and licences? Is the ministry planning on decreasing the timber royalties this year compared to last year? What assumptions or criteria is the ministry using to come up with this estimated figure? Will any premiums, fees, or licences increase or decrease next year? Which ones, and how much?

I'm glad the minister did in fact mention some of the impact that industry does have with our land use. We talk about reducing the effect of the developmental footprint. I think that's why I was quite pleased to be able to have this ministry. When I'm able to go out and take my kids hunting or at least drive down the lands, I don't want to see the cutlines through the forest, which you do see, in search of that precious oil and gas reserve.

I think we're in between a rock and a hard spot trying to have balance with industrial encroachment which, in fact, impacts our wildlife such as the caribou, which is on the quarter. I hope we don't see the grizzly on it one day because of its extinction. It almost makes me wonder if, in fact, the caribou are there one day with regard to the encroachment and all the land development that we do have within the eastern slopes of this province.

The minister talked about having more conservation officers out there with regard to being able to do more monitoring towards harvesting. The word "harvesting" is, in fact, one of the terms in e-mails and letters and cries of concern that I have with regard to being able to talk about with the Métis harvesting. The minister talked about harvesting. Is this the type of harvesting that he is in fact concerned with? It leaves a kind of blank and asks a person to wonder.

8:30

With regard to the Métis harvesting, trophy hunting, or big game trophy, the big one that the lottery, in fact, attracts so many people from down in the States, this, in fact, I don't believe is taken in with the Métis harvesting agreement. We met with a group, and it wasn't even touched, and the minister from northern development and aboriginal affairs says that, in fact, the Métis harvesting agreement does not even touch on the fact of big trophy or trophy game. That's obviously concerning.

On page 352 under premiums and fees it states that for timber royalties and fees the government is estimating approximately \$80.7

million in revenues as compared to actual figures of \$116 million. Again, why is there such a discrepancy between the two figures? We've been at this long enough; certainly we can plan and be able to significantly come up with an accurate budget. Is this government planning to significantly decrease its timber royalties as compared to last year? One has to wonder. If not, why, then, such a low estimate? Can the minister provide a breakdown as to how much it has received in royalties in the past four years and from whom those royalties have come, which companies?

On page 353 under Revenue, internal government transfers from department for forest fires, the government is estimating approximately \$16.7 million. Last year the actual budget was \$148 million. That is an amazing difference. I'm not sure why. Every year when it comes down to the forestry fires, the government, again, still can't provide pure and accurate estimates with regard to year by year. Again, why the discrepancies?

This year it's again the same problem. On the same page the estimate for the year is \$28.7 million as compared to last year's of \$162 million. Can the minister explain the budgeting practice and how we come up with such a large discrepancy from year to year?

The business plan. What other innovative approaches is the minister considering to address the volatile costs related to fighting the forest fires? The minister states that part of the strategy was to "reduce the economic burden of wildfires on communities . . . by implementing the Municipal Wildfire Assistance Program in partnership with Municipal Affairs." Has this program been fully implemented, and what would be the timeline for that implementation? Can the minister offer what measures have been developed and the efficiency of this program when they're in place? How will they be monitoring that year by year?

The business plan states that the ministry wants to "provide a clear, balanced approach to forest and forest landscape management." That would be listed in strategy 2.1. What is the ministry doing to ensure that the oil and gas industry has the same responsibilities for reforestation as the forestry industry? Whose responsibility is that? It's well known that the oil and gas industry does have the same burdens placed on it in terms of forest conservation that the forestry industry does and is required to do under the timber management agreement. Why does the minister not comply with the oil and gas industry to make sure that they have the same standards that apply to the forestry industry?

What's the ministry doing to ensure the future sustainability of the forestry industry in Alberta when economic maximization of its reserves that drives the forest behind the policies – you know, again, supply and demand. I'm quite concerned about that whole particular piece. I want to make sure, again, that that forest we develop and we rely so heavily on is going to be here for the next hundred years. We have timber management agreements in place, in fact, for 30 and 40 and 50 years. How do we know that we're going to have that forest, that it's going to be there for that 40 and 50 years? Who's monitoring the timelines of the reforestation?

Strategy 2.2 states that the ministry wants to manage the insect infestation "through effective detection and management strategies." That was probably released, as well, with their document today when they talked about more money with regard to the mountain pine beetle, which I'll get back to in a little bit. Will the minister release the details for the strategy for the mountain pine beetle infestation that's threatening our province right now? During question period he talked about the \$1 million allocated that is shared with B.C., and I told the minister that I thought that that was a token amount considering that the ministry in B.C. has allocated \$150 million on top of the \$1.5 billion, which is a long-term, 15-year plan with regard to the pine beetle there. It's already destroyed, as

the minister has said, \$9 billion worth of timber within that province.

Certainly, Alberta has just as much at stake, if not more, when we talk about the amount of people and the amount of resources that are at stake, just to mention natural resources. I'm not sure if the minister, in fact, can take some of that money that he is allocating to that program – why don't we find an Alberta-made solution? We have, certainly, some of the best and brightest minds within our universities. Why don't we in fact allocate a million dollars here to find a homemade solution with regard to the pine beetle right here in Alberta. I'm sure, like I said, that a million dollars wouldn't be wasted money. I'm sure it would be better than slashing and burning the trees, that he indicates is the best solution that he's found already.

Will the minister briefly elaborate the strategy that I've touched on right there. Maybe he'd like to specify something else besides the problem. What role is Murray Smith playing in the resolution with the softwood lumber? Certainly the ministry is aware of that. We have \$4 billion, I think, tied up with regard to tariffs and court costs. I wonder what the minister over there in Washington is doing with regard to being able to find a resolution with regard to the softwood.

Strategy 3.2 states that the ministry will "ensure that wild species are sustained for future generations by encouraging land managers to conserve habitat; maintaining up-to-date management plans." I think that's commendable, but, again, how much is enough is enough? I mean, we talk about ensuring that there's wildlife not only today but tomorrow and for future generations. We've just begun to celebrate here in the province of Alberta 100 years.

I think that's, in fact, why the Métis harvesting agreement was put in place: to ensure that these aboriginal people do have their hunting rights for the next hundred. I think they can see something that the rest of us here on the Liberal side do, that conservation is not going to be enough, that the encroachment within the public lands and the sale of the public lands and the amount of development is going to in fact drive these animals – caribou, grizzly – to extinction. They want to make sure that if there is going to be hunting allowed, they're going to be the ones that are going to be able to do the hunting. That's why they're having this agreement now, that's going to be passed down through their generations over the next hundred years. They see something, I think, that the rest of us had better be taking quite a good point on.

Are we going to be "implementing species-at-risk initiatives through expanded partnerships with conservation agencies, industries, government and academia," with universities? How will the government encourage land managers to conserve the habitat, and what plan will that be for? How will that timeline be implemented, and will they enforce timelines with regard to that?

Why is the government condoning the spring grizzly hunt when their own scientists have stated that they are species at-risk? They've talked about, in fact, putting on more conservation officers, that they're going to be doing ongoing monitoring, but I believe that these same conservation officers, these same experts that they employ within their staff, have told them already that the hunt should be halted until there are more accurate records. The minister has said, in fact, that it's very tough to track them when they're in hibernation. I agree with that point wholeheartedly, but in the spring and into the fall they've got to have a little more accuracy with regard to how many grizzly bears there are, in fact, in Alberta.

Until that time I think there should be, in fact, a stay with regard to the spring grizzly bear hunt. I think they would do a disservice, again, to the people in their employment if they completely ignore the urges of their own people as well as world-renowned scientists, mentioning that David Suzuki, in fact, wrote the Premier urging him

to cancel the spring hunt for grizzly bear that is threatened in Alberta. Why is the minister not postponing it again until the levels are more sustainable or can be more confirmed?

Moving on to another strategy, 4.1 states that the ministry wants to “provide a clear, balanced approach to rangeland management through a . . . framework that optimizes the long-term environmental, social, and economic benefits that Albertans [can] receive.” I, too, want to make sure that those are there, and that’s why I’m asking the questions I am today. Can the minister explain how the government policies are working to achieve this goal? What programs and/or initiatives is this government using to ensure that Albertans and their forests are protected? Can the minister provide a complete breakdown of what policies, legislation, regulatory provisions are being employed to achieve this strategy? Does the minister have any management plans with respect to the caribou?

8:40

I know I’ve touched on a number of specifics, more than I’m probably going to get answers to in the next 20 minutes, but I’m willing to sit down and hope that the minister can in fact enlighten me on some of the questions with regard to some of the questions that I’ve asked.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’ll look forward to it and will stand up again.

The Deputy Chair: Hon minister, do you want to respond, or do you want others to speak and participate at a later stage? What would you prefer?

Mr. Coutts: There are a number of questions that came through, and I’ll try to respond to as many as I can. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore spoke almost as fast in giving me the questions as I did in my initial remarks, so I was trying to write down here as quickly as I could. I’ll get as many questions answered as I possibly can. I was trying to write as fast as he was speaking.

The member opposite asked about lottery funding and where lottery funding might fit into our budget and some of the things that we might spend lottery funding on. He made sort of an inference that it might be hidden in some of our revenues and our expenditures. Well, there’s no hiding at all, hon. member. We don’t have and we do not use any lottery funding in our department at all, so that’s why you don’t see it there. We don’t go after the lottery fund, which is managed by our Department of Gaming. So that’s a fairly easy one.

You talked about ministerial staff and some travel and expense sheets and all the rest of that type of thing. I have to say that it did sound a lot like a Public Accounts question, but we’re very accountable in the department in terms of our expenditures and making sure that we have that. I’m sure at another time, when we get in front of Public Accounts, we can bring some of that historical data. But I can tell you that in this particular budget what we’re looking at doing is making sure that we’re being effective in the department. My deputy minister is a very good manager. He is a good administrator, and the people that he has behind him in human resources will make sure that those dollars go to the right place and to a very effective, on-the-ground management.

You talked about new staff and why we’re having extra dollars and you don’t see us hiring any more staff. Well, we’ve got a number of senior employees. As a matter of fact, we’ve got some employees that have been with us for 43, 44 years. Some of those folks are now retiring, and there’s some attrition going on, so the new staff that we have coming in for our fish and wildlife and some of those positions that we were talking about for biologists, some of

the positions we were talking about for our education programs and our guardians – that’s the reason why we have no new net increase in our FTEs.

You talked about our wildfire budget and the \$75 million that we need to get started, and you talked a little bit later, by your own admission, about the volatility of the fire season. Of course, a lot of that depends on whether or not we have a wet season, how dry it is in the forest, how dry it is on the rangeland, as well, when we’re close to the forestry. I’ll get to that in a minute about our FireSmart communities. But you talked, in addition to that, about the extra dollars for firefighting and upgrading equipment. Naturally, we want to make sure that all of our firefighters are very well equipped. We have to keep improving our equipment, and certainly as technology goes on, we have to keep up with that as well in making sure that our firefighters have the best equipment.

In terms of firefighting, just for interest, the number of wildfires we had in our wildfire year of 2003 was 1,188, and the number of hectares that were burned was 74,000, and that’s about 185,000 acres. Our five-year average is about 1,600 wildfires per year. So when you take a look at the number of wildfires that we have each year and you look at the \$75 million that we have, that just basically gets us started and will help us defend some of those smaller fires.

When we have a major fire – and we can never predict when we’ll have a major fire, and that goes back to the volatility that you talked about – we have to be prepared. We’re always prepared for a major fire, and our wildfire crews do an excellent job under the direction of Cliff Henderson, our assistant deputy minister. There are 40 years of firefighting experience just in that assistant deputy minister. His entire crew do a great job of looking after our wildfires, but if we have a big one, Mr. Chairman, and we go over this expenditure, what we do is go to the sustainability fund or an emergency fund to make sure that that fire is put out. If we go over our budget, then we can go to the sustainability fund and make sure that Albertans’ property is protected, our green space is protected, but also their homes and communities. So it’s a good system, and it works considering, by his own admittance, that there is volatility in the year.

In terms of additional dollars that we’re needing for our FireNet radio system, that’s another expenditure where we’ve got to have more reliable and improved safety and effectiveness in our wildfire operations. If you’ve ever been at a wildfire, you’ve got bombers coming in picking up water off lakes so that they can take it and put water on certain sections of the fire. Then you have other airplanes going to tanker bases and getting filled up with retardant. It’s a very sophisticated and very well-managed process to fight our wildfires. It takes a lot of dedicated people, and they do a really good job of that. The communication that’s required not only on the ground but also in the air is very, very important. Our new FireNet radio system will go a long way to making sure that we have a safe system in the future.

We talked about timber royalties, and I believe your reference was page 352. You talked about the discrepancy in the increase or decrease, and I wasn’t exactly sure about where you were getting all the numbers from, but just to let you know that there is an increase of \$18.7 million from the 2004-05 comparable forecast of \$113 million. You know, \$2.1 million is for the general provisions of manpower and \$4 million, again, for our fish and wildlife officers that we need, and \$2.6 million for pine beetles.

Now, there’s an interesting scenario. The pine beetle, as I’ve said in this House, is the biggest threat that we have to our forestry industry and to our healthy pine forests. The hon. member talked about the \$110 million that the B.C. government is putting into that, and I just wonder if he knows and understands that a hundred million

of that came from the federal government to help them do some reforestation, help them clean up some of the salvage so that they can get their forests back to a healthy state.

8:50

We have worked very closely with British Columbia over the past five years. They notified us a number of years ago that the pine beetle was on its way. Now, I don't think the hon. member fully understands that the pine beetle is a difficult beetle to get rid of. What happens is that once it's finished destroying a tree, there's no natural food for it, so the pine beetle then goes to another tree. Very often the prevailing westerly winds can carry that beetle a good three miles, so it can hop and skip over a healthy forest and land about three miles away and then start infesting a new part of the forest. That's what makes it very, very hard to get rid of and very hard to detect. There's no way of spraying with chemicals for it because they do, as I say, get into the wind, and they're carried all over the place.

It's very, very difficult to get rid of. The best way to get rid of it is for us to continue doing the types of things that we're doing in terms of aerial surveys, making sure that we do on-the-ground surveys, looking at our own industry to help us identify where the pine beetle is because they want to keep it away as well, and taking those areas and those sections and cutting it and burning it.

Now, he asked about a made-in-Alberta solution. While I was in Washington, DC, I stopped in to see the director of forestry for the entire United States of America. That gentleman, Mr. Boswell, was stationed in Kalispell, Montana, where they have a lot of pine forest. This was before he got his job in Washington, DC. He accounted to me the various strategies that they tried to use in getting rid of the pine beetle infestation of about 20 years ago, and they were doing exactly what we're doing today. They had to identify, they had to cut, and they had to burn because there was no other way of getting rid of these beetles. He said that the best thing that could ever happen is if there was a continued five to six weeks of minus 30 to minus 40 degrees to get rid of the beetle because the beetle can't survive those kinds of temperatures.

The member opposite comes up with lots of good suggestions on how we might get to eradicate the beetle, but we do have a made-in-Alberta solution. It's taking best practices from other areas, adapting it to our landscape here, and making sure that we continue to preserve our forests.

He talked about our conservation officers and the additional number of conservation officers. As I mentioned, we're looking at a number of conservation officers. Yes, with the Métis agreement we certainly could stand a few more folks out there on the ground. One thing I'm hearing – and I've heard it for years – is that we need more conservation officers on the ground. One thing I'm hearing from the fishermen of Alberta. They're saying to me when I go out and visit with them: "I just want to be checked to see if I have a fishing licence. If I'm being checked to see if I have a fishing licence, I know that they're out there checking a whole lot of other people." That's the security that people need to see, that our fish and wildlife officers are out there checking creels and making sure that people have licences. That's part of our whole balance and our sustainability and our conservation messages and methods for the fish resource. So more conservation officers and fish and wildlife officers are definitely needed, and it's expected by Albertans, and that's what we're going to do.

In addition to that, because of the pressures that are on our fish and wildlife officers, we're going to have more folks going out there and doing some education and letting people know the rules and the regulations. That's a welcome thing in this budget as well.

Particularly this summer, when we have many of our experienced staff and our dedicated fish and wildlife staff off for their own summer holidays, we're going to have the guardians to take their places so that there is a presence in the backcountry, that there is a presence on the eastern slopes, particularly with access management plans. Municipalities and people that use the backcountry like to see some enforcement out there, and they've told me for a number of years in my own constituency, as a matter of fact, with the Castle access management plan: please, have some more enforcement on the ground. So that's what we're doing, and it's a good thing for Albertans.

I've got to go back to the timber dues because I got sidelined by the way all the questions were coming from different areas. Timber dues: basically, you'll see an increase projected due to higher commodity prices for our timber products. A number of years ago we put a timber dues process in place where the timber dues would be linked to the market. Of course, we have a very, very high market right now, and that certainly reflects the high market.

Some of the discrepancies that the hon. member is looking at: we've had a number of increases in land and grazing fees due to higher oil and gas activity on public grazing lands. So those are the reasons. We've also had decreases, primarily due to timber permit auction and bid and, certainly, higher commodity prices for timber products than in 2003 and 2004. Overall, that's the answer there.

Now, reforestation. I tried to explain reforestation. I thought I did a really good job in the speech. It was prepared by our communications folks, who did an excellent job because it really outlines exactly that in 1994 we turned over reforestation from the department to a delegated authority called FRIAA, and this was done to make sure that we sustain our timber resources. They've been saying to me that they need extra money to make sure that some of the cut blocks that were done prior to 1994, before the new timber dues came into place, get reforested as well as some of the areas that were hit by forest fire previous to 2004. So what we've done is that we've committed \$1.5 million a year for the next three years in this budget to make sure that that reforestation goes ahead under the very capable direction of FRIAA.

They have three programs, and they have three separate accounts. They identify those accounts and where that money actually goes and how the money should get into the system and into the reforestation. They do surveys of cut blocks. They find out the type of soil and everything else to make sure that the species that they want to plant there will survive. They also take a look and see if there has already been growth and where they might have to do fill. They do evaluations of that, and if there's been a cut block that has had many years without any reforestation – maybe the conifer was taken off it but now the deciduous trees have taken over – they have to assess whether or not it's even worthwhile going in there.

It's a lengthy process, it's an expensive process, but they do a very, very good job on their timber resource improvement program, on their wildfire reclamation program, and their community timber program. There are those three programs, and they just do a really, really good job. They're dedicated industry people that know that the sustainability of the forestry industry relies on that reforestation, so they have a very strong responsibility there.

Now, let's talk about species at risk. The hon. member was asking some questions about species at risk, and the Species at Risk Act shows that the federal government supports the accord for the protection of species at risk in Canada. That was signed in 1996. However, in Alberta we had strong legislation in place at the time with our Wildlife Act. The Wildlife Act allows for nests and dens of both threatened and endangered species to be protected throughout the year. The Wildlife Act provides for penalties for killing and

trafficking an endangered species of up to \$100,000 in fines and/or two years in prison. So the Wildlife Amendment Act gives Alberta the authority to order penalties of up to \$100,000 and/or two years for poaching and particularly for species such as grizzly bear.

Mr. Chairman, I could go on.

9:00

The Deputy Chair: Yes. Hon. minister, I'm really impressed that you're using the full 20 minutes.

Hon. members, we have now passed that first hour. The following hon. members have indicated that they would like to speak, and I'll recognize them in this order: Edmonton-Calder, Highwood, Peace River, Edmonton-Gold Bar, interspersed in between with the minister's comments. If anybody else wishes to speak, please draw my attention.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very happy to rise to speak to the SRD budget, and I'd like to thank the hon. minister for a very complete presentation. His initial presentation was quite illuminating for me. Nonetheless, I do have a number of questions and areas to consider. I will group them together, and you can feel free to address them as you see fit, either orally or through writing or both.

In looking at the line items of this ministry's budget, one of the things that strikes me – and I know that it's by virtue of sort of the unpredictability of wildfires – is that you have such a high discrepancy between years of budgets. But, you know, at the same time I think that we can look over a longer time period and see that the ministry consistently underestimates the funds that are required to fight wildfires. Indeed, we are in a larger cycle of drier climate. Plus, the increased human activity in our northern boreal forest in particular results in more forest fires over time, over, say, the last 10 or 15 years than the previous 30. So I suppose that on a larger scale, perhaps nature's timeline rather than human fiscal timelines, we could probably more accurately predict that we do need more money to fight wildfires.

You know, in the 2003-2004 budget the ministry was almost 90 per cent overbudget for fighting wildfires, in 2004-2005 65 per cent overbudget. This budget devotes \$14.6 million to the wildfire operations budget, while last year's actual cost was on a scale of \$185 million. My first question – you can, you know, work with this later – is: why has the ministry consistently underestimated wildfire budgets? My feeling is that we could look at it in a larger sense and realize that we're going to be up against the wildfire problem in a large way over the next many years.

One thing that I find a bit disconcerting is that, you know, this will be often thrown in as a reason to alter the overall budget of this province. I know that our hon. Finance minister will bring it up as one of those things that needs to be addressed, and, well, we need to put hundreds of millions of dollars into forest fire fighting. Well, I mean we should know that from the budget from the beginning so that perhaps we could have a larger fund.

I don't know what an endowment fund to preserve our forests would look like, and that could include wildfire expenditures. I mean, this is not an unreasonable approach, I think, to be used, in a similar way that Advanced Education has created an endowment fund. We know that the forests are going to be under threat, and I think that we need more stable numbers here when we're doing budgets for wildfires.

Furthermore, in regard to the firefighting elements of this ministry, the men and women who put their lives on the line in order to fight these fires I believe – and correct me if I'm wrong – are being charged room and board to the tune of approximately \$450 a

month, or at least this was the practice in the past. Perhaps if I could just ask if the ministry still pursues this program, and is this part of a way to offset budget shortfalls to fight wildfires? I know, again, that it's a volatile situation and you have a seasonal labour market that is involved with this, but I'm just wondering how this fits in to the overall budget mix.

This year's budget included an additional \$4.4 million to enhance outreach and education, resource management, and enforcement activities including the hiring, I believe from the release today actually, of 40 full-time and seasonal staff. According to the *Edmonton Journal*, Alberta fish and wildlife officers have found Métis citizens of this province to be shooting big-game animals out of season under the guise of their subsistence rights that they have recently won under the Powley agreement. Furthermore, we are quite concerned that fish and wildlife officers themselves may not be adequately informed or trained on the full implications and details of the Métis hunting and fishing agreement.

So my question to pose to you, then, is that perhaps the ministry should rethink the amount of funding that is going to fish and wildlife officers. My suggestion – and I think this same suggestion is echoed by many people across the province – is that we need to increase the ranks of our fish and wildlife officers in a very significant way, not just with larger numbers but refocusing the intention of the wildlife officers across the province, not just engaging in enforcement but in education and in conservation in the widest possible way.

I know from reading some criticisms from, say, for example, the different sectors that in order to properly enforce the wildlife rules and antipoaching activities, we do have to pay for it. I know that with increasing pressures on our wild areas in this province – our population is increasing, and northern activity is increasing geometrically – it's just absolutely necessary that we have a greater presence in the wild areas of this province in terms of enforcement and education and other conservation practices.

The fish and wildlife officers, I believe, are represented by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, and one telling observation that AUPE did make in regard to fish and wildlife officers is that, you know, from the year 2000 – these numbers are to 2003 – the amount of contacts with the public that fish and wildlife officers were able to make was in the year 2000 approximately 230,000 contacts, which is quite healthy, and then by 2003 it was down to 70,000 human contacts with citizens. We all know that through either education or politics or whatever it is we're trying to do with human beings, you need that individual contact to have an effective impact on people's behaviour. Right? By cutting back the hours that fish and wildlife people have been allotted over the last five years and, presumably, the amount of officers in the field, the reduction in contact with citizens I think is somewhat troubling.

9:10

As the hon. minister pointed out, if people feel as though the system is working in regard to fishing – and I agree with this as a fisherman myself – if someone is checking their licence, this speaks very largely to the way that our society complies with the law in a general sense. The first rule of having your population comply with laws, in this case with fishing and hunting and conservation laws, is for the population to have the impression that the government or the governing body is there enforcing and protecting other people from breaking those laws. If somebody is out there fishing in his boat and they have that feeling in the back of their mind that Fish and Wildlife is in fact there protecting their fish from other individuals taking more than they should take, then they themselves will be less likely to go over their limit or to poach or whatever. It's all a question of confidence.

Unfortunately, with the lack of clarity in a number of different areas and then the lack of presence of fish and wildlife officers in the field over these past few years, I know from anecdotal experience and a systemic analysis of the situation that that confidence has been eroded. People feel that if there's less enforcement out there and the other guy might be taking more fish and maybe the Métis hunting rights are going to change the equation, well, I might as well go ahead and try to get away with it as well. This is an unhealthy thing, and we need to nip it in the bud.

I think a significant increase in fish and wildlife officers would really go a long way to restore the confidence of sportspeople across this province that, in fact, the SRD is serious about enforcing conservation measures in this province. So the \$4.4 million to put new officers into the field I really don't feel is adequate. I would like to ask just a question of clarity. Are we going to hire 40 new people, or are these 40 sort of new FTE positions that we might be able to pull from different places? I think that that would be a useful clarification.

I think, as well, that you have to give some confidence through the ranks of the fish and wildlife officers. I know a number of officers in the Edmonton area, and there's a real sense that they have been hard done by in the last number of years. You know, I think they could really use a vote of confidence right now, and swelling the ranks to adequate levels would go a long way.

Other questions that I would just like to ask about with this year's budget. On the press release from today, I would like to know how exactly the money that's being allocated to increase outreach and enforcement is going to be disseminated. Through which arms of the ministry is that going to be spent, and what specific programs do you have in mind? I know you mentioned a couple in passing, but through what arms of the ministry will that education element be realized?

I think that there's a general feeling amongst the fish and wildlife officers that more and more is being asked of them over time. Say, for example, the officers were involved in the culling of deer along the Alberta-Saskatchewan border to try to guard against the CWD, chronic wasting disease, epidemic that was being passed through the deer in that area. You know, I think that whole CWD decision – I realize that it's a bit of a crisis, but it seems to be sort of an ad hoc way of dealing with this thing, and then, of course, the fish and wildlife officers were thrown into that. Perhaps a more systematic way of dealing with this whole issue would be in order, and a longer term plan that goes outside the SRD, I would suggest, would be in order.

On the topic of CWD, again, this disease may have devastating effects not only for Alberta's game farmers but also, of course, on Alberta's wildlife. Government officials have so far assured the public that CWD has not touched Alberta's game farms. If it does, the results could kill an already embattled industry. It's a cross-ministry problem, and I think that it doesn't just touch on Agriculture and SRD, but it's also a health issue, and I would like to have – I think the public would as well – more clarification on what the plan is for dealing with CWD over the next few years.

There's a welcome allocation of funds in this budget to fight the Rocky Mountain pine beetle infestation in our forests. I think that much of what the hon. minister had just spoken previously about answered most of my questions about that. I just would like to put it forward that we must realize that the pine beetle infestation is directly linked to climate change. With fewer cold snaps in the winter more of these beetles survive, and away it goes, as you have mentioned. Now, counterintuitively – and this is just something to consider – the government's efforts to combat wildfires may unknowingly aid the pine beetle infestation in some manner. Fires

are a part of the natural cycle of healthy forests, and as we stifle fires, the forests become denser, and this makes it easier for the beetles to jump from one tree to another.

Although I'm certainly not advocating for more forest fires or even less wildfire combats, we would like to push for more research on the Rocky Mountain pine beetle infestation here in our northern climes. I think that we've seen this across North America. If we could allocate at least some of that \$2.6 million and devote it to research, I think that it would not be money poorly spent, especially field research because, you know, the dynamic of each area, from Colorado, as you mentioned, or somewhere that Mr. Boswell was operating from too. Here in Alberta it's a different situation, and we fight these battles ridge by ridge, and it might be interesting to have more field study on that. Okay.

So I just would like to conclude my comments. Again, going back to the line budget items, you know, I think that amongst the different ministries that I have had an opportunity to review so far – and you can give me some clarification on this, hon. minister – this one has the widest variation in budget from year to year, not just in the wildfire management section but also in your overall ministry expenses. Going from the 2004-2005 to now 2005-2006, there's just a massive variation in the numbers. I would like to seek comment on that. Besides the vagaries of fighting wildfires, there must be other things that would, you know – my understanding is that there's a 40 per cent change here from last year to this year. So I am curious about that.

I would invite your comments, and I thank you for your time.

9:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coumts: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore wants to ask a few more questions and maybe some clarifications, and I've got a few more answers for him that I wasn't able to get to in my first responses.

But the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, I'd like to respond to his questions. Hon. member, you made a number of comments, and I want to thank you very much for your comments about our fish and wildlife staff. You hit a number of issues, you know, and challenges that they have every single, solitary day in trying to make sure that we can serve and make sure that our fish and wildlife are going to be there for generations to come and the pressures that they have.

Certainly you're right. The \$4.4 million that we're getting for fish and wildlife officers is really, really important. Could it be more? Would it be better to have more? Would it be nicer to have more? Absolutely because, you know, we've got 3 million people in the province now. Our population is growing. We have an educated workforce. Albertans have a lot of time to go into the backcountry. They like their toys, and they want to be able to go back there with families and camp and fish and hunt, and they want to make sure that that's preserved for future generations. It's something that we're going to have to keep our eye on in terms of the manpower that's needed.

You asked whether these are new positions. Yes, they are new positions, up to 10 new fish and wildlife officers to help with our management programs and including, you know, the enforcement side to make sure that there aren't poachers out there and that we have people that deal with the illegal harvest and those kinds of things and to make sure that our wildlife problems – some of the things that we're experiencing now in the cities, and we work with recreation departments in the cities.

You've seen the coyote, sort of, epidemic over the last few days and the cougar attacks in the backcountry. We talk about the

education component, letting people know when they go into the backcountry what they might be able to experience and how they should maybe defend themselves against bears, against cougars, and that type of thing.

Our fish and wildlife staff, five more of those will help with those. As well, our outreach and education folks will help deal with, you know, taking some of the pressure off our enforcement guys to make sure that they can get out there and do their job. At the same time, the education goes on to help people contend with the issues in the backcountry and the issues that we find right in our own river valley parks.

So it's welcome, the \$4.4 million, and I have to thank the Treasurer and Treasury Board for that. Those are all new positions.

In addition, five new, permanent fisheries staff, and they'll conduct the surveys. I think the surveys are really, really important in terms of making sure of the inventories for our healthy fish stocks and our programs to assist in our fish management and to make sure that we do have a lake and that the habitat will make sure that the fish that are stocked in there will have a fighting chance of surviving so that years down the road the fish stocks will remain. So it's important that we have those.

There are 16 new positions for seasonal forest guardians. We have young people that are just itching to get into the business of conservation, and this summer they'll be out in the backcountry doing some education, doing some interpretation for folks that have questions about fishing regulations, hunting regulations, and things like that. Talking to people about our respect the land program will be very, very valuable in helping to preserve our stocks for the years to come too.

You talked about the firefighting wildfire budget. Some years are lower; some years are higher. It depends on the number of wildfires we have. But on the average it costs about \$195 million a year to fight fires and protect people's property and make sure that we save lives in this province. We talk about that being underfunded. Well, the nice thing about having the availability of the emergency fund, or sustainability fund, to supplement when we have a big fire is, certainly, the security that Albertans like to have. They know that when a fire comes, our staff are out there, and the people are out there to get the job done. So we do get the dollars if we need it for emergencies.

Talk about our room and board policy for our firefighters, and it is a new policy. The changes came into effect April 1, 2005. Basically the changes will apply to about 975 seasonal forest protection staff and all department salaried staff. Emergency firefighters and lookout personnel will not be affected by the change, but staff who choose to use the department's accommodation and meal services will be charged about \$450 a month. A daily rate is also available: \$15 a day for meals and \$5 a day for accommodation. This applies to sustainable resources department staff working in Alberta.

The policy was updated to make the meals and accommodation charges fair and reasonable, and these fees for meals and accommodation are comparable to other provinces. For example, British Columbia charges staff \$200 per week per pay period for the same type of service. Saskatchewan charges their staff \$18 a day, and Ontario charges their staff \$20 to \$30 a day. Staff that may want to use – they may choose to use what services they want and the applicable rates will be deducted, certainly, from their paycheque. You know, the province will recover up to about a million and a half dollars as a result of that policy change.

The chronic wasting disease. You brought up a very good point about a preventative measure that was used with the threat of chronic wasting disease that appears in Saskatchewan deer herds and

particularly up in the Chauvin area. During the summer deer from the Alberta side of the border and the Saskatchewan side of the border go along the river valleys, and there is some contact made with Saskatchewan deer. So a preventative thing is to make sure that the deer are culled on our side when we get too many deer because if we get too many deer and there's a threat of that disease coming into Alberta, it will threaten game farms as well. We want to protect not only the domesticated game farms but also our wildlife. Let me reassure you that the animals that are culled will be tested, and if they found out that there is no disease, that meat will be used for the needy.

You mentioned pine beetle again, and just let me make it very, very clear that the strategy that we have for pine beetle is to stop the spread of pine beetle coming over and threatening our healthy pine forests. B.C. presently has about 300 million cubic meters of dead pine forest over the past 10 years, and along our eastern slopes we have about 300 million cubic meters of healthy pine forest. Some of that is in parks. Some of that's in our own provincial parks; some of that's in our national parks. If the pine beetle comes in and all that turns red, all those trees are dead, it's going to ruin our scenery; it's going to have an effect on our tourist industry as well. As well, when it gets down into some of the FMA areas, it's going to have a devastating effect on our timber industry. So the best thing to do is that we want to stop it at the border, and we use the tactics as I mentioned earlier in answering the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

9:30

I think that just about sums up most of your comments. Again, I want to thank you for your comments about our fish and wildlife guys. They work very, very hard in trying to protect the fish and wildlife stocks, using conservation methods, so that our children and our grandchildren will have that resource down the road. And with this extra manpower that we're getting, we see, hopefully, a definite improvement not only in the education but also in making people realize that there are enforcement people out there and, of course, in stopping the poaching and that type of thing. So thank you very much for that comment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the Member for Highwood, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a person who was my first campaign manager on my first political campaign.

An Hon. Member: Oh, no.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

It was a successful campaign in grade 10 in Souris regional high school in Prince Edward Island. It was a very modest campaign, Mr. Chairman. She took bristol board and black magic markers and convinced enough of the student body that I could make a good treasurer of the high school. She compared me to Edgar Benson. I would now ask my sister, Dianne MacDonald, who is in the city this week on business, to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Main Estimates 2005-06**

Sustainable Resource Development (*continued*)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It just quickly pops to my mind, for the benefit of the poor sister, that you can pick your friends but not your relatives. I'm sorry, hon. member.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the hon. minister for his concise presentation this evening and certainly congratulate him on the knowledge of the issues contained in his ministry. However, I do have one question, and rather than a shotgun I'll just use a single shot here, Mr. Minister. Many Albertans, including those in the Highwood constituency and I'm sure those in the Livingstone-Macleod constituency of yours, continue to be interested in the Alberta grizzly bears, including their management and the annual spring hunt. Albertans simply want to see these bears remain on the provincial landscape in sufficient numbers for future generations. I know the Member for Edmonton-Decore touched on this briefly, and you answered some of the questions. But, Mr. Chairman, can the minister please explain how the department's new budget will enhance the grizzly management?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. When it comes to grizzly bears, this is a very emotional and sensitive issue for Albertans. It depends on what side you're on. If you're on the preventative side and want to see the grizzly bears saved, which we all do – we want to make sure that grizzly bears are on the landscape – you will not want to see a hunt. On the other hand, if you're a farmer in Twin Butte, Alberta, and your kids are on their way out to meet the bus, your wife is standing at the kitchen sink looking out the window, and your children are about, oh, a quarter of a mile away, and between you and your children there is a grizzly bear and her cub going across the path, then you have a concern. So it's different for different people in different circumstances.

We believe that the grizzly bear hunt is part of the management of grizzly bear in the province, part of the management because Gord Stenhouse in the Hinton office has done just a tremendous job of grizzly bear research, probably ground-breaking research on grizzly bears: their habits, their habitat, their territorialism, everything about the grizzly bear, particularly in Alberta and on the eastern slopes. He is the foremost authority in North America on this issue, and some of the things he's come up with, like DNA testing, are helping us to decide exactly how many grizzly bears there are in this province. But it takes a long time to determine that.

We took a number of projects. Part of our management was to preserve the grizzly bear. We shortened the grizzly bear hunt by two weeks. We increased the fines for poaching. Poaching for grizzly bear is a huge problem, but last year there were no grizzly bears taken by poaching, so we think the \$100,000 fine and/or two years in jail is a big deterrent. That's a huge part of our management program as well.

Can Gord Stenhouse in Hinton use some help? Yes, he can. One of the biologists that we're going to hire with these extra dollars this year will help co-ordinate our cariboo and our grizzly bear research, that will help address the issues associated with grizzly bears. Approximately \$350,000 of the budget will be used to make sure that we increase our grizzly bear monitoring, to research our populations, and to try and map habitats. And we can try and track the grizzly bears from that standpoint. We believe that with this extra staff and the sensitivity around grizzly bears we will strengthen

our understanding of grizzly bears and the pressures that they face with human contact.

I met with a group of PhDs over at the university here a couple of weeks ago, and their assessment is that the biggest threat to grizzly bears is the human contact. Grizzly bears like to eat by the side of the road, et cetera, because it's wide open. Some of the cut blocks that we have where vegetation has started, they like to eat there, and it's wide open. It's the human contact that is the biggest threat to grizzly bears.

So we will be able to continue with the grizzly bear inventory that we began in 2004 based on that good, sound DNA that is now an example for North America. Other jurisdictions are starting to use it, like our folks in British Columbia, so that we can compare. We have systems now where we can compare DNA, so we can track the bears going over the border into British Columbia. We also know that the bears go down into Montana. As a matter of fact, you will see bears go all the way from Sundre way down into Glacier park and further south. So the DNA is the best way to track our grizzly bears, and this is what this extra biologist will help us do to make sure that we know the numbers and keep that research program going.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I should say at the outset that I'm a professional forester, and I've been employed in the resource management industry in Alberta for 16 years now. I'm happy and lucky, I guess, that I've had two jobs in my life that I've absolutely loved and one that I absolutely didn't, so I guess I'm ahead in the game.

Being involved in forestry, I've met some just great people in the industry and some of them are seated in the gallery behind me still, I think. I've met a couple of real characters, and at least one of those is seated in the gallery behind me, as well. Being involved in this industry, I just want to stress that I don't agree with some of the negative comments and the criticism that come from the opposition benches here. There's always room for improvement, and I think the department is seeking that.

9:40

I've done things in my career here that I couldn't have done in any other province or maybe even in any other country, being involved in the conservation strategy and the establishment of the sustainable forest management network. There are some wonderful things that have happened in this province and continue to happen. I had the incredible honour a few years ago of travelling to Boston with some department staff, when I was employed in the industry, to deliver a lecture at Harvard University about some of the things that happen in resource management. Alberta is leading in North America, so I don't agree with some of the negativity. As I've said, there's always room for improvement, and I believe the department and the staff are trying to achieve that.

I did have a few questions for the minister. I want to focus, I guess, on what I believe is \$10.3 million on the operational side of the funding here, the \$10.3 million identified on page 347. I have a few questions about programs, I guess, sort of in relation to that.

First of all, the mountain pine beetle, and the minister correctly identifies the potential threat there. I thank the minister for his comments in answer to the Member for Edmonton-Decore. I wholeheartedly hope that we reject a made-in-Alberta solution in that it would be insanity for us to reject the tremendous body of academic and operational research that's out there already. I don't agree with the other hon. member who pointed out that our condi-

tions are different. There's been a tremendous amount of research done on the reaction of pine beetles to various temperatures, altitudes, wind directions, and all that stuff. We'd be insane to reject that out of hand.

In the pine beetle program I'm wondering how much of the funding is targeted at – the minister identified \$2.3 million. Are there actual staff commitments there, research commitments? With respect to the \$100 million that the federal government supplied to B.C., that's necessary because of the serious situation that B.C. is in. We're not in that situation yet, and we're not going to expect those kinds of costs if we can stay ahead of the beetle, which is the trick in pine beetle infestations. But I am wondering: is the federal government ready to commit or talk about any commitment to Alberta? Is that possible at all?

With respect to reforestation the minister identified \$1.5 million per year over three years. Does the minister believe the department has the adequate monitoring systems in place to ensure that reforestation is happening in the province, not just the reforestation that the province does but the vast majority of which is industrial reforestation? Given that there's quite a shift in philosophy about reforestation over the last few years with respect to ecologically based standards or specific standards, does the department intend to focus any additional resources into research to adjust its standards over time?

[Ms Haley in the chair]

The interim Métis harvesting agreement has been mentioned a few times tonight, and the minister mentioned 10 new additional officers. Maybe I do agree with a member of the opposition here about: is that sufficient? Is the minister confident that the enforcement end of it can be accomplished? He spoke at length about the monitoring end of it. Also, is the minister contemplating any research like additional wildlife inventories, or anything like that?

The last area, I guess, is the area of forest tenure, and the minister didn't address that tonight. It wasn't asked. How does the department plan to respond to pressures on the tenure system from such things as the softwood lumber dispute that we're having and the pressures that the Americans are putting on our tenure system? New ways of practising forestry, like ecological management. The pine beetle could have an effect on our tenure system if we want to adjust to meet the demands that we're going to face there.

Also, we're seeing a consolidation in the industry, partly in response to the softwood lumber dispute, and that's put pressure on local communities and on our tenure system. I wonder if the minister could say anything about how we're planning to respond there.

Lastly, I had a question, and this is more of a plea, I suppose, than a question. The minister talked about improvements to airports and to the water bomber fleet. I wonder if I could ask the minister on a personal note and on a constituency note that the department sometime this year review the fees that the department pays for airport use. We're an incredibly significant user of northern airports in particular and in my constituency Manning, Fort Vermilion, and High Level, and I feel that we should ensure that the department is paying fair and competitive rates for airport use there when those small northern airports, that are so important to the north, are under such pressure.

I'll leave my comments there and invite the minister to respond.

The Acting Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman, and thanks

to the hon. Member for Peace River. I want to thank the hon. member for his valuable input to our ministry and to me personally. Your expertise in the forestry industry over the years in some of our talks certainly has helped me with some of the decisions that we've had to make, and I really, really appreciate that. I know that you have a passion for the industry, and I know that it's an important industry for your area, and you represent your constituents well in terms of what forestry means. More importantly, what I've found is that the long-term sustainability of the forestry industry is important to you, and you really do express that well not only to me but to members of this House.

You talked about making sure that our forests are healthy forests, about our ForestCare, that you had a big part in, and conservation, that the research that's gone into all of that is used wisely and that it's used by the department. Absolutely. It's an ongoing initiative on behalf of the department: looking at certification, looking at standards, making sure that our forest companies are all part of that, looking at our reforestation, monitoring, making sure that the surveys that are being done by FRIAA actually fit the bill, and making sure that the reforestation is done in a sustainable way because that is big. Not only is the pine beetle going to have an effect on our resource and our annual allowable cut in the future but also the reforestation and the speed with which our forest grows as well.

You talked about the federal government, their commitment of the \$100 million to B.C. Has the federal government committed any dollars directly to Alberta? We're doing some monitoring, particularly in our parks, which the federal government is responsible for, and that monitoring will decide whether or not the federal government participates. We'll certainly make sure that we continue the dialogue with them to make sure that not only their forests are protected but also that when and if – and we hope it never happens – it does get to the national park boundary on our side, it doesn't spill over into our forests. So that is something that we continue to monitor and work with the federal government on.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Métis harvesting. This also responds to Edmonton-Calder and Edmonton-Decore about Métis harvesting and the number of people, the extra enforcement officers, that we would have. Right now I'd like to report to the hon. member that certainly in terms of big game, Métis, if they've taken a trophy sheep, for example, have got to register it with us. The same thing for goat and the same thing for cougar and grizzly bear and that type of thing. They have to register.

9:50

In terms of: has it escalated beyond the capabilities of our enforcement officers to keep up with it? Up till this September 145 bighorn sheep were taken in the province, and of that, seven were taken as declared by Métis. Now, the thing is that we don't know whether those Métis were in previous years normal hunters. Right now we don't see a proliferation of taking some of these trophies by the Métis. We feel that we have a right balance between the number of enforcement officers out there and the numbers of wildlife that are taken, but it's something that we have to continue to monitor and manage, again, for future generations. If we need more enforcement for that type of thing, if we see a proliferation of it, then of course we have to react to that.

You talked about tenure. The 20-year tenure system has worked well for certainty not only for the companies on wood supply and management plans. It's given them the opportunity to come up with cutting plans, et cetera, et cetera, and you're more versed in this than

I am. It provided certainty for the company, but more importantly it also provided certainty for Albertans that their resource was going to be reforested and that the annual allowable cuts wouldn't be exceeded, et cetera, because the industry itself wants to make sure that it's sustainable for the future.

In 2006 we're going to see a tenure renewal pretty well across the province. We're not going to change that because it's worked well. The 20-year tenure has worked well. It might look somewhat different but not a lot different. We've got to make sure that we keep the innovation and that the research that companies like you were working for and the research that's shared with the department and the new technologies that are out there are taken into account. Plus, as you mentioned, the softwood lumber negotiations that are going on stream: we also take that into account and whether or not some of the exit ramps that we're looking at for the duties that are being put on and the negotiations that allow those exit ramps to come off would be incorporated into the tenure.

There are a couple of other things that we need to address as well. We've got a value-added, secondary manufacturing industry that is looking for fibre all the time. In order for them to survive, they need fibre, so there's been an initiative under way. In the tenure should we put a provision that they must sell to our secondary manufacturing? Those kinds of negotiations continue to go on.

A review of fees for our airport use. I'll certainly take that up with the department. You talked about the viability of your northern airports, and that's the responsible thing that you should do as an MLA, so we'll certainly review that.

Thank you very much for the questions.

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hear that the members across are wanting questions, and I'm willing to give some more.

Just to get back to the minister with regard to some of his comments that he had for me. I appreciate that he does have some people with 40-plus years of experience. That's how this industry is able to remain strong and vibrant, because of that ongoing expertise. I commend him in being able to attract and retain people for that long.

With regard to understanding the pine beetle, I did have an opportunity to speak with the Member for Peace River, who did give me a bit of an understanding that you just cannot spray these pests as they do in fact bury themselves within the wood itself. I asked the member and quoted to him: the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Is there, in fact, a natural predator that can be released with regard to taking out the pine beetle? You didn't think so. In fact, you've got to worry about introducing another species because that would have an effect on that as well.

Cold weather. We realize that it's going to take cold weather for five to six weeks to be able to kill off the beetle. You know, my memory goes back, and I don't think we've had cold weather now for a couple of years. I believe that if we do get it, it may be a freak occurrence now. The weather is getting warmer. The seasons are not like they used to be 20 years ago. That's just a fact. So it's certainly nothing that we can rely on. I think that if we're going to get a cold snap, it might be every five or six years if we're quite lucky.

The reforestation on burnt-out lands. I'm not sure, in fact, as to who's responsible for that. If it's the ministry itself and they will in fact hire this FRIAA to do some of the reforestation and have them go in and monitor, I'd appreciate that information. I would appreci-

ate a little bit more background with regard to FRIAA and their overall impact and what their intent with regard to the industry is.

The biggest threat, I think, that we have with regard to wildlife and land use remains basically the development and the encroachment with our industry. Again, as I indicated earlier, that puts us between a rock and a hard spot because our economy is basically driven by the natural resources that are out there with oil and gas, and we have to be able to maintain a balance. Education is one of them but, again, balance and to be able to extract what we need in a reasonable process, keeping people employed but, again, respecting the environment. That's the biggest thing right there, and I'm quite concerned that we're able to have some of the lands and the resources and the natural habitats, the wetlands, around for future generations.

Education is certainly part of the picture. I'd use education the way that this ministry used it to warn Albertans with regard to West Nile. I thought it was a good communication strategy. In fact, I saw the commercials throughout the summertime. So a commendable effort on that particular piece.

We talk about the early spring awakening, or the thaw, with regard to the grizzlies. We were able to in fact feed these bears so they weren't going to go off too much out of their regular migrating season or area. We were going to be giving them roadkill, or at least that's what I anticipated or heard. It was roadkill. When we get some of this roadkill that we are feeding the bears because of a lack of food with regard to their early hibernation, do we test this roadkill for CWD as well? That way, we have an idea as to how much of it exists within the wild.

I appreciate some of the comments with regard to the cull on the Saskatchewan border. I'm just, again, skeptical. Obviously, the deer cross in more than just one path, but research has told this ministry that this is a good indication that they should be going here. They did take about 300 deer, which is quite a large number, but what about the vacuum effect? I've heard that industry people have talked about that once those deer disappear, there are going to be more that are coming across. How do you, in fact, effectively monitor the migration? Some had indicated that they are only within a one kilometre radius, and I've had others that say that they can migrate more than 300 kilometres. I mean, who do you believe on that particular thing?

Again, if I could make another plea with regard to the grizzly bear. We appointed a grizzly bear recovery team that called for the postponement of the spring hunt, and the reasoning was that they found that the present number of the grizzly bears in Alberta was around 500. I realize that we are in fact talking about DNA analysis. I'm not sure if we're setting up barb tests for that and then individually picking out the hairs and doing DNA samples on that or if it's through other means of DNA samples that they're able to do this.

The team recommended that the number of grizzly bears should be placed at about a thousand to be able to warrant a hunt. A thousand would be a healthy population. Even this number, according to the World Conservation Union, would still be listed as vulnerable and would still therefore be considered facing a high risk of extinction in the wild. The whole crux of this is this government's refusal to listen to not only, as I mentioned before, science but the Albertans who have also demanded that the spring hunt for the grizzly bear be suspended. I would again urge not only on behalf of my constituents but other Albertans that have written me and e-mailed me even through the election and just after I raised it within this House, that are still very much concerned about making sure and maintaining these wild bears in their natural habitats. Those would be a couple of specifics that I would just ask the minister to comment on.

10:00

Then, finally, the lowballing, again, of the overall budget, with an explanation as to how we come up with about a 30 per cent or a 40 per cent difference with regard to even the fighting of the forest fires. I know that there is, in fact, about a \$110 million shortfall in some cases, and that's when the supplementary request comes in.

I've asked a number of questions again here right now, and I'm hoping that the minister will be able to answer them for me. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(4), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration for a department's proposed estimates, I must now put the following question after considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

Agreed to:

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases | \$219,215,000 |
| Capital Investment | \$20,500,000 |

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the estimates of the Department of Sustainable Resource Development and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, for the following department.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$219,215,000; capital investment, \$20,500,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head:

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 37

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2005

[Adjourned debate April 18: Ms Evans]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this evening to speak to Bill 37, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2005. I would just like to comment that of the several bills that have

been presented so far this sitting in the Legislature under the guise of housekeeping, this one is, perhaps, most appropriately described that way, and I will be recommending to my colleagues that we support this bill. [some applause] Thank you. It is, indeed, as near as I can tell, a housekeeping bill which allows the government to enact various other pieces of legislation that have either been passed or will undoubtedly be passed in the next few weeks.

Having said that, there are a couple of items that I'm sure you're all anxiously awaiting my comment on, and in particular, I think, would be the striking out of the \$4 billion capping of expenditures of resource revenues and lifting that to \$4.75 billion. I found that really interesting in the government's press release, where it described that the spending of resource revenues would be limited to \$4.75 billion, and it didn't actually refer to the fact that we're raising it by \$750 million. So it was sort of interesting the way that that was spin doctored, if I can say so.

It really does beg the question as to whether or not this government has any sort of a concrete plan for budget surpluses, and again I'll cite the Alberta Liberal Bill 203, which is before the House right now and which refers to a solid plan that deals with surplus revenues and how we believe that they should be dealt with in order to ensure that there is, in fact, a legacy for not only today's residents of this fine province but, in fact, for our children and their children and their children. Unfortunately, I don't see that we're addressing that by lifting by \$750 million the amount of resource revenue that the government is allowed to spend, so I would certainly like to point that out.

The other thing that I find interesting, and perhaps when we get to the committee stage, the minister will enlighten me on it, is the fact that we are including under this proposed act now the provision for adding settlements with First Nations as an expense that would not be – sorry. I don't have the exact wording here, and I'm looking for that. It would not be an actual expense of the government and, therefore, would not constitute a deficit if, in fact, it were to go over the estimates. I guess the question, really, in my mind is: why was this not in there before if there's so much concern?

The minister is indicating that it was in there before, but that's not the way I read the bill. If you can explain for me, you know, when we get to the committee stage or at some point, I would be interested to hear that because I'm just wondering if it was an omission when the bill was first drafted or if, perhaps, there was something on the horizon that I'm not aware of that caused some concern and prompted that particular provision to be added into the bill now. If the minister is indicating that it was there in some other fashion before, and she would provide that information for me, I would be interested to receive it, for sure.

Beyond that, Mr. Speaker, as I said, it does appear to be truly a housekeeping bill. I could comment on several aspects of it, the \$3 billion cap, but of course we've had ample opportunity to mention that before. I'll just briefly say again that I do believe that capping it at \$3 billion is, in fact, a mistake. If anything, we should have set that as a floor, not a ceiling, and I am disappointed in the budget that we're only committing \$250 million to it this year when at that rate it will take us 12 years to reach the ceiling. The government's own projections show only an \$11 million return on that investment this year, which is, quite frankly, a pittance to postsecondary in the way of an endowment. So I'm disappointed in that. Nevertheless, the act will be passed, and this will allow us to put that \$250 million in there. It is important to at least begin with that, so I'm not going to hold that up.

10:10

The other thing that I am pleased about, something that I've been talking about both personally and now more recently in my capacity

as an MLA and the Finance critic, is that we are taking some steps to inflation-proof the heritage savings trust fund, and I'm certainly pleased about that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will recommend to my colleagues that we support this bill. I see several others anxious to rise and speak to it as well, so I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am happy to rise and speak in favour of Bill 37. I find it refreshing that we see at the heart of this bill an increase in utilizing nonrenewable resource revenue to increase our program spending in this province. I think that it's a useful and necessary thing to do at this juncture given the practical, other details of this budget but also as a way to set a precedent to place more of this money into program spending.

You know, it's important, though, at the same time to realize that we need to come up with a longer range plan by which we cannot just spend or put away this money in the, sort of, post debt scenario in this province but also to put away and make a plan for a post oil and gas era for Alberta as well. I mean, I realize that that is a long-term planning thing to ask for, but I think we owe it to the future generations of this province to have a plan like that in place and for our own peace of mind, to know that we are not spending away the assets that we currently enjoy in this province at the expense of future generations.

I think that one aspect of this act, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2005, that I would perhaps like to bring forward – and we can discuss it in third reading or committee stage – is putting some of the money that we have as surplus back towards the heritage savings fund. I think that, you know, the heritage savings trust fund has been languishing somewhat in these past years. When we build a budget and if that budget is reasonable to meet the programming needs of our province, then it seems reasonable that the heritage trust fund should see some of that surplus to build for the future.

As well, I hear a lot of talk from the two other parties in this House about using surplus funds for planning for education or for other aspects of our jurisdiction here as a Legislature. But if we planned for the way that we should program in the first place, then it would seem to me that, you know, we would be more responsible in funding programming such as postsecondary education and not just sort of leaving it up to the vagaries of surpluses to build the proper foundation, say, for an expansion of our postsecondary education or, let's say, our public health regime that we have or public education from K to 12, et cetera.

In a way I'm hoping that Bill 37 might be a bit of a contagious act, Mr. Speaker, in the sense that we can be more honest in looking at what our true revenues are going to be instead of being so notorious in our lowballing of those revenue numbers and then coming back later in the year to announce to the grateful public that we have such huge windfalls. You know, I'm hoping that this precedence, I suppose – that Bill 37 suggests that we spend more money on programming in the first place, I think that that is an altogether more honest and realistic way to budget for Albertans and show transparency for Albertans to see where their money is going.

So, again, just to conclude, we are certainly in support of Bill 37, and we'd like to see more of these proper program funding increases in the budget in the future.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In regard to Bill 37, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2005, I just have one question that hopefully will be answered during the course of debate. That question would be around the accumulated debt. It's slightly less than \$3.5 billion, and one of the concepts that we're looking at here this evening is to lock by law the final \$3.5 billion to retire the debt into the debt retirement account in a fashion that, I think, is going to continue right through until 2017. Some of these instruments are long term, and they don't come due until that time. It could be even later than that.

But what, exactly, is going to be the manner in which the interest is going to be used on this account? There have been discussions in the past, certainly whenever the government was so reluctant to adequately fund the public school boards to settle the issue between the teachers and the school boards. There was a suggestion from this side of the House that some of the money that had been previously set aside, the interest from that could be used. This could be a lot of money generated in interest revenue from this. Exactly what is that money going to be used for? Certainly, whenever we consider that it's this government's policy that it's forcing the public board in the city of Edmonton to close four good schools to save in operations costs anywhere from \$140,000 to \$90,000, perhaps some of the interest that's accumulated in this account could be used to support neighbourhood community public schools.

I look forward to the answer from the hon. minister. We could be talking about a considerable amount of money here, and I would like to know how that's going to be used.

Thank you.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there have been some excellent comments and questions, and I think I understand from the members who have asked that they would be quite pleased to entertain some further dialogue in Committee of Supply, and as I introduce it in Committee of Supply, I will make comment and answer questions and all of that.

Those would be my closing comments on Bill 37.

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a second time]

Bill 29 Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Amendment Act, 2005

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening to move second reading of Bill 29, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Amendment Act, 2005.

10:20

This important amendment will offer a new personal income support program for AISH recipients through the introduction of supplementary benefits. As you know, when the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports was created last fall, it was the first time that responsibility for adult disability programs was placed within one department. In responding to the recommendations of the MLA committee reviewing the AISH program, we knew the importance of addressing the recommendations in a comprehensive and coordinated way that is responsive to the needs of people who rely on our programs.

All members know that there have only been two types of benefits available under the AISH program. The first is the living allowance, which I announced last week would be increasing to a maximum of

\$1,000 by next April. The second is the comprehensive health benefit package, which is provided at no cost to AISH clients and includes full coverage for their health care premiums, prescription drugs, as well as full dental services, eye care, and essential diabetic supplies. That package is worth approximately on average about \$300 a month.

Last week I was pleased to announce that this year we will introduce a new benefit for Albertans on AISH: the personal income supports through supplementary benefit program. This minor legislative change outlined under Bill 29 will allow us to offer this new benefit which was previously not available under the AISH program component. This new benefit will help make AISH a more holistic program and be more responsive to our client's needs.

The new supplementary benefits will cover a variety of costs, and I'd like to briefly tell you about just a couple of examples, Mr. Speaker. There are more than 1,000 single parents on AISH as well as about 400 couples with children, and we've heard that some have had difficulty making ends meet when it is time for their children to go back to school each fall. In addition to the living allowance increase, which would help ease some of the pressure, the client will now be able to also apply for the new supplementary benefit to help cover the cost of school supplies or school fees. Previously this was not possible under AISH because the program didn't have a separate, flexible benefit category to offer that coverage.

Clients could also apply for additional financial assistance to cover such costs as wheelchair repairs or wheelchair batteries, which, as you know, can be very expensive, in some cases up to \$400. For those clients looking to enhance their skills so that they can work, this benefit would also be used to cover such costs as transportation to employment or training programs that may help the clients improve their skills.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but given the hour, I won't. The reason I could, though, is because the coverage that will be offered by the new supplementary benefit program I think will be as unique as the needs of the clients. Through this new personal income support we will offer supplementary benefits and be better able to assess and address the needs on a case-by-case basis. At first the benefits are expected to provide an average benefit of about \$180 to \$200 a month for eligible clients.

It is important to note that these supplementary benefits will be available for all AISH clients who have less than \$3,000 in liquid assets. That's approximately 80 per cent of the client base. To be clear, we are referring to liquid assets. This does not include the individual's home, their vehicle, or other items in trust. This was the level that was indicated by the MLA committee, and we spent a lot of time carefully choosing that figure because, as I said, it's approximately 80 per cent of the client base that would be eligible. Most importantly, it will help ensure that those who have few resources to cover unexpected costs will have some extra help.

The supplementary benefits will be made available for AISH clients later this year. This fiscal year it is expected that these benefits will cost approximately 10 and a half million dollars. It's actually beginning immediately, but it takes time for the IT and whatnot to be set up, which is why it won't begin this month. Next year, the first full year the benefits will be available under AISH, it is expected to cost approximately \$25 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, last Friday I did announce the renewal of the AISH program, and that renewal included an unprecedented investment in the AISH program, which was an \$80 million increase in the budget, bringing total program spending to \$488 million this year. In addition to the new funding, as a result of the MLA review process we are making important changes that will make this program more responsive to AISH clients. The renewed

AISH program offers clients a significant package of benefits, especially with the new addition of the supplementary benefits through this personal income support program. And that, as I said, will address the clients' needs.

So with that, I would move adjournment on Bill 29, the AISH amendment act, for discussion at a later date. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

**Bill 11
Stettler Regional Water Authorization Act**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 11, the Stettler Regional Water Authorization Act.

I'm very pleased to have the support of the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler for this bill. This bill will ensure a safe, secure water supply for approximately 6,000 Albertans across nine communities in central Alberta. This act will allow Alberta Environment to issue a water licence, Mr. Speaker, to transfer treated drinking water from the town of Stettler to the communities of Donalda, Big Valley, Rochon Sands, White Sands, Byemoor, Endiang, Erskine, Nevis, and Red Willow.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this bill, and I will just make a couple of comments because I know that we discussed this in great length, which I think was one of the better debates that I've heard since I've been in this House. There was a great deal of information shared. There were a great deal of concerns expressed from this side of the House that were answered, and I think that made me a little more comfortable with this. There were three things. The Liberals certainly wanted a water protection plan with a conservation act that went with it, and I believe there was some good discussion around that conservation. I'm not altogether sure that this bill totally addresses how deep I would like it to have gone, but it certainly is a start.

Another thing that was discussed that is very alarming, or could be alarming, to me is – and I'm hoping that we have that assurance that we would be protected and not ever sell our water so that we would become involved with a NAFTA problem that could blossom into a softwood. We certainly don't want to go that route.

The other thing that I think is very good about this bill is that any time there is a water transfer in water river basins, it must be approved by this House. I think that from all Albertans' point of view, because this is so very, very important and we are changing the way our whole geographic and environment works, it must come to this House.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close debate?

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has moved third reading of Bill 11, Stettler Regional Water Authorization Act.

Mr. Eggen: I don't know if I caught you. I was going to speak.

The Acting Speaker: I did not recognize you, and I'd already recognized the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close debate, so I don't think there's provision that I could come back to you now.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

Bill 19
Securities Amendment Act, 2005

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tuesday night I spoke in response to questions regarding Bill 19 during Committee of the Whole, and I hope I was able to clarify some of the concerns the hon. members had about this legislation. However, my colleagues will be very disappointed, but I must confess an error. Bill 19 will require ministerial approval of remuneration for the chair, vice-chairs, lead independent member, and commission members. For the record I wish to clarify a remark that I made during Committee of the Whole when I noted that remuneration would be vetted with an OC at the ministerial level. No OC is required, but ministerial approval will be required.* This will provide for an appropriate level of government oversight through increased accountability and minimize potential conflicts of interest.

10:30

Before we proceed to third and final reading, I would briefly like to highlight the importance of this bill. As I've stated, this legislation helps to fulfill a commitment we made with our provincial and territorial partners in a memorandum of understanding to reform the existing securities framework and inspire greater investor confidence. In order to provide more consistent regulation across Canada, this legislation will further harmonize various provisions of the Alberta Securities Act with those of other jurisdictions.

The recent allegations against the Alberta Securities Commission, though unrelated to this legislation, have nonetheless highlighted the importance of enforcement. Mr. Speaker, Bill 19 gives the commission more bite, as one of the hon. members commented, by enhancing enforcement and compliance powers through a variety of means, as I outlined during second reading and in my comments Tuesday. It sends a message that the government of Alberta takes security legislation very seriously and is working to improve our ability to enforce those laws.

Tuesday night some of the hon. members also repeated their assertion that we should pursue a single securities regulator. I responded to this during committee, but I would like to just repeat that the memorandum of understanding focuses on steps we would need to take if in the future the provinces and territories wanted to go that way.

In any event, Alberta remains committed to working with the other provinces and territories to improve securities regulation that inspires investor confidence and supports competitiveness, innovation, and growth through efficient, streamlined, and cost-effective securities regulation.

I urge all members to support this important legislation that makes it easier for businesses to access capital markets across Canada while at the same time ensuring the highest levels of investor protection.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 19, the Securities Amendment Act, 2005. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I indicated when

I spoke to this bill in second reading that I was willing to accept that it is better than nothing, and it certainly is a step in the right direction. I recognize that the passport system, while it might not be the single entity that I would personally prefer, certainly is some ways along that route. In fact, in a personal conversation I had with the minister, there was some indication that there may be some possibility at a future date of having an overriding, overarching umbrella that would operate above the various provincial commissions.

So I'm a little confused, quite frankly, because the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky indicated in his comments during committee that there was absolutely no way ever that this government intended to look at a single commission, yet tonight he seems to have maybe backed off on that a little bit. I'm not sure if that's what he meant or not. I hope it is because I think there is value, at least, in considering that based on some of the comments that we've had from various stakeholders that that might have been their first choice in a perfect world and given that the political will wasn't there to proceed in that regard, this is a good alternative. So I'm just hopeful that that's what he meant tonight when he made his comments in third reading.

I appreciate his recognition of the fact that there was an error in his comments the other day. I think I indicated that I was actually pleased to see that the minister has final authority in setting the remuneration of those various members because I do believe that there is value in that in this particular case. The fact that the minister would have final say I believe is a good thing.

The fact that this takes us into a situation where we're in line with what other commissions are doing across the country and allows for a more seamless approach by various investors when they look to do business in Alberta I think is a good thing. I've mentioned that already.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, although it might not be everything that I would have hoped for, it certainly is not a bad first step. Given those comments, I will again be recommending to my colleagues that we support this bill, and I look forward to seeing, hopefully, the positive effects of it.

The last comment that I would make, Mr. Speaker – and, again, I think I made this comment when I spoke to it in second reading – is that when we were speaking to stakeholders, there were allusions to the fact that maybe some of the enforcement changes in here didn't go quite far enough. At the time I wasn't necessarily sure why we were hearing that because nobody was coming right out and saying: you should do this, or you should do that. There were sort of veiled concerns that maybe it wasn't quite enough.

In light of some of the stories in the news now and the fact that the minister has requested a review by the Auditor General, I'm hopeful that, in fact, these changes will be enough. I'm also looking forward to the report from the Auditor General, which the minister has indicated will be tabled in the Legislature and available for all Albertans to see. That is a good thing because it's paramount that investors have every confidence in their investments in Alberta and in the commission that overrides the Securities Commission. So I'm hopeful that the bill will accomplish those things and address the concerns that we were hearing in a sort of veiled fashion from some of the stakeholder groups. If it doesn't, I suspect we may be back here a year from now looking at further amendments to address that, but I'm hopeful that, in fact, this will accomplish that.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to recommend to my colleagues that they support the bill, and I look forward to any further debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

*See p. 726, right col., para 1

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, had made rather extensive comments in regard to Bill 19 during second reading. The main issue, my main concern, I guess, with Bill 19 was in regard to how it was going to flow through and indeed support and encourage the development of a national securities regulator. That's not to say a federal but a national body that could oversee the securities exchanges of each of the provinces and territories.

Considering that we didn't receive entirely a clear answer to that, I do have a notice of amendment that I would like to pass out to each of the members now. This amendment from my colleague, Mr. Martin, is to move that the motion for third reading of Bill 19, the Securities Amendment Act, 2005, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 19, Securities Amendment Act, 2005, be not now read a third time because it inadequately addresses the need for a national securities regulator."

The NDP opposition has during earlier stages of this bill highlighted the need for a single national securities regulator to better protect investors and catch corporate bad guys, so to speak. It's important to note that a national securities regulator does not mean a federal government regulator. In fact, a single regulator would be a collaboration of the 10 provinces and the three territories modelled somewhat along the lines of the Securities and Exchange Commission in the United States. Nor does a national securities regulator mean that all of the activities will take place in Ontario. While SEC's head office is in Washington, DC, in America, it has a number of regional offices located in other centres more or less proportionate to the amount of capital market activity that originates there.

10:40

When it comes to investor protection and pursuing corporate crime, Canada is a rather small player compared to the much tougher laws in the U.S. Enron, WorldCom, Martha Stewart, and Tyco have all been prosecuted in the United States, where they take corporate crime very seriously and have the tools to pursue it. Let's take the comparison to the track record that we have here, let's say, for example, with Bre-X, which arguably was one of the biggest scams in corporate securities history. Due to Canada's weak securities laws, none of the Bre-X principals were ever held accountable for their crimes.

A big part of the reason for this patchwork quilt of securities regulation in this country is because of this provincial regulation that we adhere to. I don't think Bill 19 will do much to improve the situation. In fact, the passport system implemented through Bill 19 could, I would suggest, even make things worse. According to Wayne Alford, the former director of enforcement for the Alberta Securities Commission, the passport system could contribute further to, as he said, a race to the bottom. Alford notes that with 13 jurisdictions the incentive is to lower standards in a province relative to other provinces in order to attract capital market participants. Of course, this is not necessarily in the best interests of any investor anywhere.

I want to briefly quote from a guest column Mr. Alford published in the October 2004 *Economics Society of Calgary* newsletter. In it he states:

The Passport System will perpetuate many of the current complaints. There will still be infrastructure duplication. There will still be thirteen regulators who can make whatever rules they see fit. There will still be inconsistent investor protection and enforcement. Government oversight will still be inconsistent.

For the above reasons, I urge members to support this amendment at this time, and I invite you to reflect on it and make comment as you see fit.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, just for

the record, this reasoned amendment that you moved was moved on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Is that correct?

Mr. Eggen: That's correct. That's right. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we have a reasoned amendment before us. Anybody wish to participate?

[Motion on amendment lost]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

Bill 23

Administrative Procedures Amendment Act, 2005

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General I move third reading of Bill 23.

As he indicated during second reading, the bill is in response to two Supreme Court rulings that have made it necessary for provincial governments across Canada to specify the authority of tribunals in their jurisdiction. The bill streamlines the regulatory process, preserves access to justice for the boards that have the capacity to handle constitutional issues. Bill 23 ensures that boards up to the task of determining these complex issues will have the jurisdiction to do so and makes very clear that boards that do not have that same capacity will be free to do what the Legislature needs them to do. The bill will cut down on unnecessary litigation concerning the jurisdiction of Alberta tribunals and will save time for the litigant as he or she will not have to have the question of jurisdiction slowly winding its way through the various appeals.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Bill 23 is a necessary piece of legislation that will greatly enhance the administration of justice by clarifying the roles of our boards and tribunals while at the same time maximizing meaningful access to justice.

I'd ask all hon. members to support Bill 23 at third reading.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been following – I don't want to use the word monitor – the progress of Bill 23 through this Assembly since the day it was introduced, and I'm not convinced that this bill is necessary at this time. Now, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education spoke about the need for this bill and specifically section 12 and the notice of question of constitutional law, but I'm not convinced that we need this at this time. I'm not convinced that the reasons that the hon. minister has just recently given are in this case valid.

We are looking at what has been described to me as an unusual procedure, and it's also being described in the research that I have done to be an elaborate legal stunt. I would certainly caution all Members of this Legislative Assembly before Bill 23, the Administrative Procedures Amendment Act, 2005, is passed into law, that we reconsider this. I know from my time in this Assembly that this will not happen, but I just find at this time in the history of this country and as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms continues to be defined by various levels of our parliamentary process that I don't understand why this is necessary.

With that, I will take my seat, but I'm not convinced that this is

something we need at this time in this province as we see the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms unfold. I don't understand why we need it.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: The question has been called. Hon. Government House Leader, would you like to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

Bill 32 Animal Keepers Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 32, the Animal Keepers Act.

As you know, this act will replace the Livery Stable Keepers Act to better reflect its extensive use by the cattle industry while retaining its clarity and ease of use by animal keepers. Extensive public consultations were undertaken, and I'm confident that we addressed any concerns that were raised about Bill 32 during these consultations and also in committee. I believe this legislation reflects the needs of today's livestock industry, and stakeholders will welcome its proclamation.

I want to thank the staff of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development for their help and guidance on this bill. I do appreciate the excellent comments and support from the members of this Assembly for this bill. That being said, I'd like to move third reading of Bill 32, the Animal Keepers Act.

10:50

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Bill 32 certainly seems to be an improvement, and anything we on this side of the Assembly can do to assist, we're quite happy to do it. The process to date certainly seems to have been more than fair. Everyone has had an opportunity to have input into this change. I almost think it is just an update, really, and would be glad to support that.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For someone who has difficulty keeping goldfish, I obviously had to make many phone calls to find out what this bill was about.

An Hon. Member: What happens to the goldfish?

Ms Pastoor: My goldfish run away.

The people that I did speak with had nothing but good words for this bill, that they are updates that were way behind. So I stand up to support this bill, and I do have the support of many of the people that I spoke with that are in the livestock industry behind that.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to reiterate some of the comments I made when we were back in committee, I believe it was or perhaps in second reading, and that is to compli-

ment the minister and his ministry for the tremendous job they did in consulting with stakeholders.

I would hope and plead with him, actually, that he would implore some of his colleagues to do the same when they're developing bills in the future because it is a comment that we do hear from time to time, that various stakeholder groups have not been consulted enough. I'm thinking particularly of Bill 15, the amendments to the WCB act.

This is such a pleasant thing. As opposition when we're contacting stakeholder groups to see what comments or input they may have, and they indicate to us that they have been fully consulted by the department, that is really pleasing for us to hear. It does in fact make our job as opposition that much easier, too, to know that there has been an effort to include the various stakeholders.

So I would just like to once again commend the minister and the ministry for doing that and again would encourage all other ministers to do the same because it really does, I think, contribute to the democratic process.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace to close debate.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd now ask for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a third time]

Bill 33 Stray Animals Amendment Act, 2005

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 33, the Stray Animals Amendment Act, 2005, on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

I'd like to thank all members of the Assembly for the debate on this bill at second and in committee. I understand that the minister was able to answer all the questions that were raised. We believe it's a solid bill after consultation with the stakeholders and would ask the Assembly to agree to third reading.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development has answered the questions that were presented earlier in debate, and there are no problems on this side of the House with the Stray Animals Amendment Act, 2005.

I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to pass this bill immediately because there seems to be a need for this legislation on the far reaches on that side of the House. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour I'd move that we adjourn to 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:56 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

