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**Cuts to Lands Department**  
**Committee of the Whole—2017-2018 Operating Budget Review**  
**Dept. of Lands—February 23, 2017**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I will start with some general remarks, if I can, following on my colleague from Yellowknife North. This department actually is going to take some of the biggest cuts in this budget of any of the government agencies, over \$2 million out of its operating budget; six positions are going to be lost; the operating budget is going to be cut by 7.4 per cent.

There are a number of issues with some of these cuts, as well, but we still do not have a plan and a schedule to bring together the lands that are administered by this department under the Commissioner's Lands Act and the Northwest Territories Lands Act, and that is something that committee has asked for and we have not seen a plan yet.

One of the things that I have continually raised in this House is the issue of making sure that, as a new landowner manager, we have to get our financial securities and liabilities legislation up to speed to make sure that we do not inherit any further liabilities which are going to cost the taxpayers money. We have had people working on this issue now for at least three years, but there has not been one piece of policy, not one legislative change that has come out of this department to make sure that we protect our taxpayers and the environment from assuming new liabilities.

Just to go into a little bit more detail about this, and I am going to raise some of this as we go through as well, but we acquired the Mactung deposit through credit or protection, proceeding where we did not actually have financial security for the surface lease at Cantung, but in acquiring the new property we do not know what kind of liabilities we have taken on. I have asked the Minister this, and I will pursue it again, and how that information is going to be disclosed to potential buyers. Lots of questions there.

I know that Cantung has generally been taken over by the federal government after it went into receivership, but we still have a surface lease there, and I want to know the status of that surface lease and whether we have given that back to the federal government to reduce any exposure that we have.

Another property, Prairie Creek, we do not have full financial security for the assets and the buildings and so on that are at the site. We are exposed and we have not done anything to change that. In fact, the company is now in an over-hold tenancy position, so we have the ability to change that surface lease and correct that problem now. Do not wait for the property to go into production. Do it now.

There are some things in the budget for this department, the Northern Canadian Centre of Excellence for Remote Sensing. I am not quite sure exactly what that is and how it ties into the Mackenzie Valley fibre link optic cable and completion of that. There was a Northwest Territories Centre for Geomatics. That seems to have been put on the back

burner because of the fiscal strategy of this government. So I am not sure how well that is going to come together, and I will have some questions around that.

I will also have some questions around land use planning. I understand that there is some work that is being done to look at Crown lands within the Wekweeti Management Area, some kind of terms of reference are being worked on.

I want to know what the legislative basis is going to be for creating land use plans for those Crown lands. Just having it done by some sort of an agreement, even if it is the Tlicho Agreement, there needs to be a legally binding land use plan, and it needs to be established in legislation.

One of the cuts, though, that has not been discussed so far is the reduction in travel for our inspectors. There is going to be a 33 per cent cut in the travel budget for our inspectors. We promised to do better than the federal government, and we are not going to live up to that promise if you go ahead with these cuts. We already have the funding through devolution. It was part of the A-Base funding to carry out our management responsibilities. We already have that money, so I don't know why we are cutting money out of inspections to fund the fiscal strategy and fund infrastructure projects. That is just wrong, so I will have lots of questions around that.

The last thing I guess I would like to raise in my opening comments is the increase in lease fees. These are long overdue. Some of those fees have not been touched in decades. I am in favour of increasing the fees, but it needs to be done in a graduated way to avoid sticker shock, and that is not what is being proposed in the departmental budget. You have a recommendation from us as Regular MLAs to phase that in, and that is something I think the department should look at more seriously. I think that is all I have, Mr. Chair, as my opening comments, but you can see I am going to be pursuing a number of these matters as we go through the departmental budget. Thank you.