

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Water Stewardship and Transboundary Agreements
Committee of the Whole—2017-2018 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources—March 1, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. In the Minister's opening remarks, he talked about how there was an extra \$2 million to continue implementation of the Water Stewardship Strategy including work on the Transboundary Water Agreements. I think that amount is found under the watershed management item listed on page 79. Is that the case, Mr. Chair?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister McLeod.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Yes, the Member is correct, Mr. Chair. It is. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister McLeod. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Is this \$2 million in funding, a new initiative or is this a renewal? Is it an increase? Just maybe if I can get a little bit better description of what happened here. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Ms. Craig.

MS. CRAIG: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The funding for the Water Stewardship Strategy and Transboundary Agreements has been renewed on an annual basis in the past. What expired or sunsetted at the end of 2016 was \$1,016,015. Our budget was changed to \$2,056,000 for 2017-18 and ongoing for three years. The net increase to this area was \$441,000. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Craig. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the response. That's good to hear. If I just do the math here and add in 441k from 2016-17 to 2017-18, there are obviously some other things that are going on here within the Watershed Management function of the ENR.

Sorry, I'll just digress here for a second. Part of the problem is there's just no detail provided in the mains or even in the business plan about what this money is being spent on. I guess I would urge the department to find a better way to present what's going on with these functions in their business plan so that we can actually see where any money is brought in or things are being sunsetted and reduced and so on. I think it might have been in an earlier version of the business plan that we saw, but it's certainly not in the public version. That's just an aside.

Maybe I could ask if that's something that the department could look into so we don't have these big globs of money and not really knowing what's going on within the function. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I think there was some

information of the activity description in the front there as to where it might go. I take the Member's point though about – I think he wants to know exactly where all the money is going and, I would have to go back and see because I thought during our business planning process, we gave a better indication of where it was broken down as to where the money was going to go and then we bring it forward to a business plan and we have the one figure here for \$3,600,030. I'll go back and look at the business plans and if there's an opportunity to provide a bit more information to committee, then that's what we will consider doing. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I'm happy to have an offline discussion with the Minister about this. There was a difference between the business plans that we reviewed in September and was publicly available. It's always a bit of a balancing act for a number of different reasons. I'm happy to chat offline about that. Let's go back to the numbers that are presented here in the mains.

There is something else going on within the watershed management. I think my colleague from Yellowknife North talked about source water protection being reduced. Can someone from the department talk a little bit more about that? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Dr. Kelly.

DR. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There's been a reduction of \$115,000 for source water protection funding. That money has, over the years, contributed to the development of guidance documents on source water protection for opportunities to use as well as workbooks. We've held community workshops and completed the workbooks with communities. We've produced source water protection maps. We've completed train-the-trainer events with some of our local environmental non-government organizations. We believe that we have the resources in-house within the water resources division to support continued source water protection in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Dr. Kelly. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the level of detail provided by the ADM. That's helpful. We have the materials now. Presumably, they're being distributed and there's some assistance from local and regional ENR staff. I'm not sure that's quite good enough to make sure that source water is actually protected. We need the plans.

I don't think it's just ENR's responsibility, clearly. There's a role for MACA here as well. MACA does spend a lot of money and tries to build capacity within the communities to have sound water systems for communities. Part of that is to make sure that the source water is protected. Just as MACA is doing some work to try to make sure we're going to have safe water for all of our residents and all, whatever sized-community you live in, we've got another department cutting some of the funding that could be used to help support that.

We finished the guidance documents. I guess I don't understand why this funding can't be used to support, say, workshops or getting people maybe even together on a

regional basis to look at actual source water protection plans and how you actually develop and implement them at a municipal level. I'm not very happy with the cut. Maybe the department can convince me otherwise. What we have here is departments working at cross purposes and I think we need to find ways for them to work together better. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Dr. Kelly.

DR. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. ENR, MACA, Health and Social Services and Public Works work together on an interdepartmental drinking water committee. The source water protection money was for source protection planning. We have produced guidance documents and workbooks, as I mentioned, that will help communities. With respect to the other money that's part of Watershed Management and water research and studies, that also contributes to source water protection in the Northwest Territories because we do biological monitor as well as water quality monitoring. The Transboundary Water Management Agreements are a significant part of source water protection for the Northwest Territories. We feel that we have the expertise and the ability within other areas of the Water Resources Division to support source water protection and communities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Dr. Kelly. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the explanation. I guess I'd be much more favourably inclined if we could find then a way to re-profile this money to actually support communities preparing source water plans, but we could probably be debating this for a lot longer. That's enough for me. Thanks, Mr. Chair...

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... **MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Sorry, one other quick question depending on answers. Page 80, water strategy action plan is being reduced. From 2015 16, we've seen this decline from 585 down to 325 for 2017 18. I believe this is money that's provided to perhaps aboriginal governments to make sure they are engaged in implementation and negotiation of these agreements. Is that what this is for and why is it declining? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Dr. Kelly.

DR. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This money is used for engagement when we were doing negotiations. We completed negotiations on two of the agreements and we have moved to implementation of those agreements, so the money has changed from contributions and grants to contract work to support the implementation of the agreements. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. That is what I suspected, but we still have outstanding negotiations with Saskatchewan, Nunavut, and the Yukon. The agreement

from 2002 needs to be updated in light of what was negotiated with BC and Alberta. I know BC and Alberta were big ones, but Saskatchewan and Nunavut are still presumably fairly large, and then you have implementation now on top of that. Why does this continue to climb? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Dr. Kelly.

DR. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The first round of consultation on the Yukon agreement and the Saskatchewan agreement was completed in previous years while we were doing the work on Alberta and BC, so we have less consultation to do on the agreements that will be coming forward. The timing of those agreements is spread out so we don't need the money in grants and contributions for that work at this time, as much money, and we know that we can do it with the amount that is in here now.

The other money has gone to contracts towards implementation of the two agreements that we have signed. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Dr. Kelly. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks for that. I thank the ADM for the explanation. So, the money for the contracts, that would show up where in this function, under contract services, which has increased? Is that where it would show up? Thanks, Mr. Chair.