

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Inspection Resources and Capabilities
Committee of the Whole—2018-2019 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Executive and Indigenous Affairs—February 27, 2018

MR. O'REILLY: Sure, yes, there is shown in the business plan a \$50,000 reduction to the water regulatory budget, and I think it shows up on page 86, as well. Can someone tell me what that reduction is all about? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the \$50,000 the Member refers to is to reduce the contract service budget within the water regulatory section, and the water guidance documents will be further reduced because my understanding is that most of this work has already been done. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So what is the total contracting budget, then, for water regulatory? If it is reduced by \$50,000, what is left? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, there is \$481,000 left in the budget. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: I guess this is a reduction of over 10 per cent. So, it is coming at an interesting time, where there is some significant closure planning underway for Snap Lake. Diavik is redoing its closure plan. There is stuff happening with the Jay expansion; there are a lot of management plans and things that need to be reviewed in that regard. So it is not like it is not a busy time or anything, so what is the rationale? \$50,000 seems to be a rather with round number. What is the rationale here for the cut? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we are well aware of all the work that needs to be done. The department feels like that work can be done within the existing \$481,000 budget. The \$50,000 I spoke of earlier, before, was to reduce contract services within the water regulatory section. The department obviously feels like they have the capacity to do the work that is required within the \$481,000. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: [Microphone turned off] Yes, I remain concerned about this. A \$50,000 cut just seems to be a convenient number for the fiscal reduction targets, so we will just leave it at that, but, once again, I do not see any real rationale for this cut because I do not think there is a reduced level of work or activity.

I want to follow up on some remarks made by my colleague the MLA from Nahendeh about moving the water inspectors to Lands. I know I had questions for the Minister of Lands about this. To me, it would make much or sense to have the Lands inspectors moved into ENR. ENR does the wildlife inspections. You do other environmental inspections. You do water work, as well. I think all of those environmental-related inspection activities should be housed within this department. Is that conversation or that discussion happening between the two departments? Can the Minister let me know what's happening, if anything? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

DR. DRAGON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, that conversation has been happening. As I mentioned earlier, in opportunities where we have had in the regions where, unfortunately, we have not had the capacity, Lands officers have been able to provide some support. Again, the Lands officers are typically funded for positions that are on those mines specifically for lands and water. So we have been talking about ways in which we can gain efficiencies. However, mainly the efficiencies have been realized through collaboration and coordination and where we will go onto sites together and we will plan flights together, and so on and so forth. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Before anybody tries to say that I do not think people are doing their job, that is not the case. These folks have to work very hard. The Minister knows that. He is even laughing when I am saying this because he is probably going to come back on me about it. Those guys have very difficult jobs because they have to deal with members of the public, members of industry, who do not always understand what they are trying to do. I guess, is it fair to say that the water inspectors have a different kind of training and perhaps even a higher level of training and responsibilities under the water licences than, say, the Lands inspectors do for the lands department? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

DR. DRAGON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. ENR water resources are regionally based positions, and they inspect water licences at mines, metal mines, oil and gas sites, hydroelectric facilities, municipalities, and camps and lodges. They are specialized staff and in situations where our water officers -- typically they have to have university degrees -- based on when they are looking at, they are inspecting provisions for effluent discharge, monitoring, and waste containment, to provide a few examples. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: [Microphone turned off] I think the deputy minister has confirmed my point there, that the water resource management officers do have a higher level of training than the Lands guys. That is not to say that the Lands guys are not important. They do their own thing. In any event, can I get a commitment out of the Minister that he will look at this issue of where the inspectors are parked and do their jobs -- and they do it well -- about maybe getting some efficiencies by reorganizing some of that and

bringing the Lands folks into ENR? Can the Minister commit to come to committee with some ideas and options on this? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, as the deputy said before in response to your earlier questions, we haven't had the conversations at an officials' level. We haven't had it at a political yet. If they're looking at some different options, I'm sure they will bring them forward. The Member's quick question was: will I commit to bring this information to committee if they request it? I would be glad to do that. Let's gather some information, and then we will present to committee, and then we'll see the kind of feedback we get from committee. There's an opportunity that we still have a number of business plans coming up in the fall, so there will be opportunities there. I will provide some information. Thank you, Mr. Chair.