

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

MR. O'REILLY: Okay, thanks, Mr. Chair. So I think this is the section of the department where water use fees would be found. These would be fees that are paid under water licences. Is that correct, Mr. Chair? Thank you.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: That is correct.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Can someone with the department tell me what the water use fees were, what those revenues were for last year, and what they are anticipated to be for this year? Actually, I think it is found on page 66. It is just up there, isn't it, so that is the \$80,000? Is that what that is? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. CRAIG: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The budget for water use fees is on page 66. It is \$80,000 per year. That is the budget. In 2016-2017, we collected \$47,000. The amount that we will collect in 2017-2018 is dependent on exactly how much water is used by the licence holders. We really will not know the total amount until the end of the fiscal year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So, the water use fees, is that something that we would be looking at revising in the review of the Waters Act? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. CRAIG: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I understand that the water use fees are set in regulations, and they are applied by the land and water boards. As the Assembly knows, we are putting through a review of our Waters Act this year in this Assembly. The next step would be looking at the regulations, so there might be the opportunity at that time to increase the water use fees. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, the reason why I ask this is I am just looking at the water regulations now on my computer here, and the highest rate seems to be about \$2 per 100 cubic metres of water. That seems to be a pretty low rate. You know, people pay more than \$2 for a bottle of water at the grocery store. So has the department done any work to look at comparable rates that are charged by other jurisdictions in Canada for water use? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I am sure we have done some work. I am not exact. I will confirm that, as to looking at comparable water rates, and we will see. We will do some research. I will commit to the Member that we will do some research and see what our rates are compared to the other jurisdictions, and then we will plan a course of action from there. I will commit to getting that information. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, I appreciate that the Minister is going to do that work, and I know that he is really keen to look at new sources of revenue. Certainly, this is one, and this, these rates, have not been touched in decades. I can tell the Minister that. I think, quite frankly, we are giving our water away. These rates, as I understand it, are comparatively low compared to most other jurisdictions in Canada, and this needs to be changed. This is one of the reasons we got devolution, was to try to make sure that we get a fair return for the use of our resources, and I do not think these sort of rates for use of water are what they should be. So I leave that with the Minister. I will look forward to getting his information, but this, to me, seems like an easy one to do compared to a land transfer tax. I will leave it at that. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, as I said, we will go back, have a look at the information, and see where it goes. I mean the Member is right. A Minister is always looking for -- Minister, this whole Assembly should be looking at other sources of revenue, and this may be one of them. We will do our due diligence, and then we will come up with a plan from there, but then I need to know that, once we decide to do that, that I have got the support of committee and not have people running in 10 different directions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.