

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Transboundary Water Agreements
Committee of the Whole—2019-2020 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Executive and Indigenous Affairs—March 6, 2019

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I think that I heard from our friends here that, in water management and monitoring, there was an \$85,000 reduction in water research and studies and a \$50,000 reduction in travel. I am wondering how that is impacting our ability to negotiate the Transboundary Water Agreements. Maybe I could start with: have there been any new agreements signed during the life of this Assembly? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In my time as Minister, I have signed one Transboundary Water Agreement, and I believe that that was with Alberta, but I inherited the portfolio, I believe, about a year and a half into this Assembly. We have three existing Transboundary Water Agreements right now with Alberta, British Columbia, and the Yukon, but I believe that the other two might have been signed in the 17th. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. That was my understanding, that there haven't actually been any signed during the life of the 18th Assembly. You can see it even on page 85 of the main estimates, where water partnerships and agreements has a \$200,000 reduction between 2018-2019 and those proposed for 2019-2020. Even if you go back further in time, the budget was higher. Are these progressive cuts over time affecting our capability and capacity in terms of negotiating and signing these arrangements and implementing them? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The short answer is that it doesn't. I think that Dr. Dragon gave an explanation before about the fact that we are trying to use a lot of video conferencing now when we are having some of these discussions, but there is always going to be a need for some face-to-face conversations. I believe that there is still some money that is available for that. No, we don't believe that it is affecting our ability to try to negotiate these Transboundary Water Agreements, and if there comes a time when we feel that it is affecting our ability, then I am sure that ENR will come back to the FMB. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I am, of course, just trying to find what it said in the mandate commitment. I think that the understanding was that we were going to actually have all of these remaining agreements signed off, including ones with the Yukon and Nunavut and so on. How come we are not making as much progress on these as we had anticipated at the time that the mandate was put together? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We would like to try and make as much progress with our partners as possible. We are always prepared to go to the table and do some negotiations. Negotiations involve two parties, and if our other party is not getting to the table as quickly as we would like, then that affects our ability to get this work done. I said before, when I was responding to the Member's question, that I know that I signed the one Transboundary Water Agreement with Alberta. My understanding is that a final BC-NWT agreement was also signed in 2015, and we are holding an information session with Nunavut about the process and progress to date with respect to the Transboundary Water Agreement. ENR met with the Government of Saskatchewan to discuss a Saskatchewan-NWT agreement for shared waters. The final Yukon-NWT agreement was signed in 2002, and parties to the existing agreement met in March 2018 to discuss the existing Yukon-NWT transboundary water agreement. I think I took a long way to respond to the Member's question about whether it's affecting our ability or not as far as the negotiations go, and the short answer is that we do not believe it is. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So, yes, the mandate commitment is we will negotiate Yukon, Nunavut, and Saskatchewan toward the completion of a transboundary water agreement, so does the Minister expect, then, that by September we are going to have negotiated transboundary agreements with Yukon, Nunavut, and Saskatchewan? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My understanding is, with the Yukon, we are expecting to have updated agreements to be completed during the life of this Assembly. My understanding is Saskatchewan is going through a legal review, and Nunavut is doing some water strategy work. The Yukon one will be updated. We will see what happens with the legal review out of Saskatchewan. I am not sure where Nunavut is at. I would like to see them all done by the life of this Assembly, seeing as it was a mandate commitment, but sometimes we do what we can to try to expedite our end; we just need our partners to work with us to get their end of it done, as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.