

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Inadequate Staff Resources
Committee of the Whole—2021-2022 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources—March 09, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I appreciate that from the Minister. I'm a bit concerned that the core of ENR is starting to shrivel up again because this is what supports all the other work that the department does. I want to ask: the policy legislation communications line, there's no increase there yet. As I understand it, the department is doing work on the Forestry Act, the Environmental Protection Act, Waters Act, and Protected Areas Act. There's some work being done on regulations as I understand it. Where is the capacity of the department if there's no increased funding to do all of this work? Is it just being done off the sides of people's desks? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. In regards to the work, we're very capable of doing it. It's a discussion that we've had, but for further detail with your permission, I'll turn to the deputy minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Deputy Minister Kelly.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Madam Chair. While policy, legislation, and communications provides a support function for legislated development, the majority of the work is done within the divisions by forest management, for example, for the Forest Act or by the conservation group for regulations related to Thaidene Nene and Tu'eyeta, the Waters Act would be the water monitoring and management division, et cetera. There is a lot of capacity within the divisions, and they are supported well by the staff that we do have in the policy, legislation, and communications division. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Just in case anybody gets the wrong idea here, I am not saying that staff are not capable of doing the work. I know that they work very, very hard, and we saw that in the 18th Assembly. I just don't want to kill them with the work like we almost did with what we put onto them at the end of the 18th Assembly.

On Friday of last week, I can't even remember what day it is anymore, we reviewed the ITI budget, and they had over half a million dollars for a new unit that they had created for implementation of the Mineral Resources Act alone. It was \$360,000 if they could contract work out with, and then they had moved a couple of staff people in there to develop regulations. I'm just astounded that we have one department that takes that approach and other departments don't do the same thing. I know that these folks at ENR work very, very hard, but I am worried that they don't get the support that they need to get the work done. Why has the Minister not gone to the FMB to get more resources so that they can get the work done in a timely fashion? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. I thank the Member for his passion, and I appreciate the good words he says about ENR. When we talked about this and we looked at our budget and we looked at what our legislation is going to be and our requirements, we feel presently that we can do the work with the different divisions within the department. We are able to achieve that. If we need to, I will not hesitate to come back and ask for more money if we require it, but right now, we feel comfortable that we are able to achieve it in a timely manner within our existing budgets presently. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I appreciate the Minister saying that. I pleaded with the previous Minister in the last Assembly to get more resources to get the work done, and I continue to do that. restrictions has worked well. I can tell you that our enforcement in the mobile zone and looking at adherence to that mobile zone has been very, very positive. In terms of working through a full-blown plan, we are still in the midst of that plan. We have been doing multiple plans, coming to the government with the opportunities to see how we are managing the herds. I will just have to come back with a date of when we plan to actually produce that range plan. Thank you.