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The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

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Please send corrections to Hansard Editor: kate_covello@ntassembly.ca

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Tuesday, March 4, 2025****Members Present**

Mr. Edjericon, Hon. Lucy Kuptana, Hon. Jay Macdonald, Hon. Vince McKay, Mr. McNeely, Ms. Morgan, Mr. Morse, Mr. Nerysoo, Ms. Reid, Mr. Rodgers, Hon. Lesa Semmler, Hon. R.J. Simpson, Mr. Testart, Hon. Shane Thompson, Hon. Caroline Wawzonek. Mrs. Weyallon Armstrong, Mrs. Yakeleya

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON):

Please sit. I'd like to thank Mary Jane Cazon for the prayer song today to start off our session.

Colleagues, good afternoon. In yesterday's ruling, I urged caution in your language here and social media. As I said previously, it is frustrating that posts continue to be brought to my attention. Again last night, a post was brought to my attention. I feel the post did not accurately reflect my decision. The post suggested I found no wrong was committed. My job is to interpret and apply the rules we have agreed to. It does not mean someone, or their actions, are right or wrong. And to be clear, as stated in my ruling, had the Member made those comments in the House they would have been out of order. Members should not use social media to get around the rules of the House. I was also clear that the same words could have resulted in a different ruling if they had been made by a different Member. I expect that Members will address their concerns about their future posts. Thank you, everyone.

Ministers' statements. Minister for ECC.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 107-20(1):
READY FOR WILDFIRE 2025

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, as the 2025 wildfire season approaches, I would like to provide an update on the planning and investments we have made to support wildfire prevention, mitigation, and resilience. Our approach is focused on preparing people and communities across the NWT to live safely alongside wildfire, ensuring that we are ready for emergencies.

Last year, we launched a number of new FireSmart programs, including the FireSmart Advanced Home Assessment Program and the Neighbourhood Recognition Program. Across the territory, more than 100 Northerners had

their homes assessed, receiving expert guidance from fire professionals on steps they can take to enhance fire safety.

Critical to this success was the engagement of community fire departments across the NWT. Over the winter, 15 local fire departments received training in the Neighbourhood Recognition Program, with additional sessions planned for the Advanced Home Assessment Program.

Mr. Speaker, last month we announced \$10 million in additional investments in FireSmart initiatives over the next three years. We are also working with a number of communities on vegetation management projects that build on \$20 million in federal funding being administered by the NWT Association of Communities. We look forward to sharing the significant improvements and innovations as the work progresses.

We have funded eight community wildfire preparedness day projects, empowering local teams to lead these initiatives. We are also forming regional and territorial FireSmart advisory groups that will help guide the critical FireSmart work we are currently prioritizing.

We are excited to co-host a wildfire preparedness gathering in Yellowknife this spring, in partnership with the NWT Association of Communities. This event will bring together fire department members, community leaders, and Indigenous leaders from across the NWT's forested communities. Activities will include training on wildfire management, fire behaviour, and FireSmart practices, along with cross-training exercises to enhance local response capabilities. This reflects our renewed commitment to interagency cooperation and cross-government collaboration.

Mr. Speaker, our team has worked very hard to prepare for the upcoming wildfire season. They have taken advanced fire behaviour training, fulfilling a key recommendation in the 2023 wildfire review. We are continuing to mobilize personnel, aircraft, and equipment to respond to a potential early start to the fire season and have invested in additional structural protection

equipment to ensure a rapid response when any property is threatened.

Annual training will start shortly to ensure our wildfire management teams are fully prepared once the snow melts and fire danger rises.

In short, Mr. Speaker, our team is ready to fulfill this government's promise of safe communities for Northerners, communities that are more resilient to a changing climate that has resulted in longer and more severe wildfire seasons. We will continue to invest in a wide range of activities, education, and training that enhance wildfire prevention, increase resilience, protect communities, and allow our team to respond quickly and efficiently to protect residents and the natural beauty of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of ECC the Ministers' statements. Minister of Health and Social Services.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 108-20(1):
YELLOWKNIFE PRIMARY CARE CENTRE
OTTAWA MODEL FOR SMOKING
CESSATION IMPLEMENTATION

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, almost 30 percent of residents in the Northwest Territories over the age of 15 consider themselves as smokers. Smoking, which includes vaping, remains one of the worst substances for your overall health and can significantly reduce a person's life expectancy. That is why the Government of the Northwest Territories continues to find new ways to support residents in making the shift towards a smoke-free life.

Mr. Speaker, smoking is an addiction that often requires several attempts and a combination of tools and supports to overcome. We recognize that quitting is not easy, especially on your own, but with the right resources it is possible.

Today, I am pleased to share a significant milestone in improving our health systems' support for residents so they can quit smoking and be healthier. On January 20th, Yellowknife Primary Care became the first health care facility in the Northwest Territories to implement the Ottawa Model for Smoking Cessation; a gold-standard in Canada for integrating supports to help people quit smoking into their routine health care practice. This means that when a resident visits the Yellowknife Primary Care, a standard part of their visit will include being asked about their smoking status. People who indicate that they are smokers and are ready to quit will be actively offered support specifically tailored to their needs by a health

care provider trained to help people quit smoking.

In other regions, implementing the Ottawa Model for Smoking Cessation has been shown to significantly increase how often health care providers advise and assist residents in their efforts to quit or reduce smoking. This approach has led to:

- Increased long-term smoking quit rates;
- Lowered health care use; and,
- A lowered risk of premature death.

Mr. Speaker, implementing this approach at Yellowknife Primary Care is just the first step this government is taking to enhance the supports for residents who are ready to live a smoke-free life, and work is underway to bring this gold-standard model to Stanton Territorial Hospital and eventually to health centres across the Northwest Territories. If you are ready to quit smoking, you can talk to your local health care provider at any time or call 811 to talk to a registered nurse trained to help you quit smoking. This is a service that is available to all Northwest Territories residents 24 hours a day seven days a week. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Frame Lake.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 551-20(1):
ACCESSIBILITY TO PRIMARY
HEALTHCARE IN THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have spoken a lot about the need for establishing measurable targets for priority implementation, and today I want to put that lens on our priority for access to health care. When we set this priority, what I specifically meant by it was putting a focus on ensuring everyone in the NWT has access to primary care. Since setting that priority, we have seen the Premier establish the health care sustainability unit and, most recently, the health Minister appointed a new public administrator for the NTHSSA. Together, these changes are heavily focused on the financial aspects of system sustainability, but I question whether we have appropriately weighted the importance of access to primary care in our health care goals and planning.

I will acknowledge that the public administrator's mandate does include primary care reform as does the business plan but, similar to my concerns about other priority areas, I think we need to be more specific about what exactly we are working to achieve. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, when I look to the business plan for the health department, I note several key items.

One is that an integrated primary care framework is develop and performance monitoring is in place by 2025. Great first step. However, there isn't a target identified for what this framework is meant to achieve.

Second is that performance measures are established and trended to identify improvement areas, but the target is listed as target not established. So we have some work to do.

Together, these targets don't tell MLAs or the public what outcome we are trying to achieve with primary care reform or prioritization. As I said last week, if we don't communicate what we are trying to achieve, it is impossible to know when we have achieved it.

In her book Health for All, which I'm happy to note I saw on the health Minister's desk, Dr. Jane Philpott suggests that leaders need to articulate a vision, and I emphasize, with a measurable end result. Dr. Philpott suggests the goal at the provincial and territorial level needs to be universal access to a primary care team. Our goal should be everyone in the NWT has access to primary care. I think that the department is working towards a goal like this but it is not clear that is indeed the goal or when we expect to achieve it. So let's make it clear, Mr. Speaker. I'll have questions for the Minister at the appropriate time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Members' statements. Member from Great Slave.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 552-20(1):
SAME-DAY PRIMARY CARE SERVICES IN
THE NORTHWEST SERVICES

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sensing a theme day.

Mr. Speaker, the riding of Great Slave is a walkable Yellowknife constituency. Part of the attraction of the riding for residents is that it is close to downtown but close enough to nature that folks can enjoy green spaces like the gem that is Tin Can Hill and ease of access to Great Slave Lake.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also very aware that many of my constituents either choose not to have or

cannot afford vehicles to take them to other parts of the city that are less walkable. I try to hold all my constituency events in the riding or near the riding with this in mind. My upcoming event this weekend is easily serviceable by transit at a well used city facility, for instance. But, Mr. Speaker, receiving same day primary care services can be hard to plan for when you need to spend money on a cab to get to the Liwego'ati Building or timing public transit in the heat of the moment to get yourself and a sick family member to the clinic uptown. I'm concerned that limiting access to same day primary care service downtown is creating hardships for folks of limited means in my riding, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services at the appropriate time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Members' statements. Member from Range Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 553-20(1):
SAFETY OF STANTON TERRITORIAL
HOSPITAL STAFF

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, hostile situations at Stanton Territorial Hospital's emergency department are not out of the ordinary. Hospital staff, including nurses and doctors, are increasingly facing threats, verbal abuse, and even physical assaults. Last Saturday, when MLAs were notified about a person who had entered the facility in a hostile state, it was not clear what was so exceptional about this particular event. Only yesterday I was shocked to learn through the media that someone at the hospital had pointed a firearm at staff. This is a serious escalation of the violence emergency department staff were becoming accustomed to, and I am very grateful no one was hurt.

It is completely unacceptable, Mr. Speaker, that emergency department staff have cause to fear for their safety. The emergency department is vital to our health care system and has only become more essential with primary care changes that have limited access. The NWT's experiencing both a drug crisis and mental health crisis exacerbated by increasing poverty and homelessness. So it is no surprise that violence is escalating at an emergency department which has become the only place many Northerners can find care. With gun crime proliferating in the North, alongside the increase in drug activity, it would seem it was only a matter of time violence at the hospital would start including individuals armed, not just with knives but handguns as well.

The only thing standing between threats to staff are private security guards that have neither the training nor the commitment to handle firearms.

They are not able to contain threats like these, and the hospital itself has no code silver for them to call despite repeated requests at occupational health and safety meetings from staff for new procedures like a code silver to be implemented.

Nurses are now asking me, Mr. Speaker, is the Minister listening to their concerns. Now I am asking the Minister will she do whatever it takes to keep them safe, including updating Stanton's standard operating procedures and providing security with the staff, resources, and training they need to do their jobs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Members' statements. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 554-20(1):
RENT INCREASES IN COMMUNITIES FOR
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES WORKERS

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to address the issue of possible rent increase for tenants who are residing in market housing within the Northwest Territories.

It is my understanding that there has not been a rent increase since 2012. There are only a few market housing units available within each of the communities. The tenants of these units are in the workforce and trying to assist in building the economy of the Northwest Territories. Increasing their rent on only a select few will not alleviate the debt of this government is experiencing, but it will put the tenants in more hardship that they are already enduring.

Mr. Speaker, again we see this government targeting the resource people of the Northwest Territories. In our smaller communities, we have teachers, social workers, the RCMP, and local residents, who are trying to live a healthy and prosperous lifestyle. With the high cost of living within the smaller communities, the resource people, even the locals, cannot afford a rent increase any time soon. Everything from the cost of heating fuel, and especially cost of groceries, will have a negative impact on their decision and employment status within their respective communities. Smaller communities cannot afford to lose these resource people and try to recruit others with the rent increase is imposed on them.

Mr. Speaker, Housing NWT and this government has to look at other options to increase revenue and not target the workforce who are trying to be productive members of their communities and the NWT as a whole. The smaller communities of the Northwest Territories need these resource people to be

stationed within our communities merely for the fact that we do not have local professionals to fill these positions.

Mr. Speaker, with the housing crisis that we are experiencing, we do not have other options to house our resource people, so we cannot afford to increase their rent. Another fact is that some of these units and buildings are older units so increasing the rent on units that have passed its life span should not be even considered. Some of these buildings are 50 years old. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, colleagues. Mr. Speaker, if the Housing NWT is going to continue with this rent increase, then please consult with the tenants of market housing, give the tenants a grace period to adjust or find other options for accommodations. Consultation is key when you are negatively impacting our residents of the Northwest Territories, especially the smaller communities. I will have questions for the Minister responsible for Housing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Mackenzie Delta. Members' statements. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 555-20(1):
LAND LEASES IN THE INUVIALUIT
SETTLEMENT REGION

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in June 2023, the Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes provided a Member's statement which was following up on a motion she brought forward to the House in relation to Indigenous peoples having cabins for rights-based purposes and how they should be exempt from lease payments for those rates-based camps and cabins, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in the NWT Lands Act in section 19(d), it states: To set apart and appropriate such areas or territorial lands as may be necessary to enable the GNWT to fulfill its obligations under land claim agreements in the Northwest Territories and to make free grants or leases for that purpose.

Mr. Speaker, one example is the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, an agreement that is constitutionally-protected, an agreement that provides for certain rights to Inuvialuit to access and establish camps as part of exercising their right to harvest; an agreement, Mr. Speaker, that we signed as the GNWT.

The Inuvialuit Final Agreement specifically states that the Inuvialuit need not pay fees to

exercise their right to harvest, including their rights to establish camps. This has been ongoing for several years, Mr. Speaker, and the response has always been we're working on it. I still have examples in my riding where leaseholders are being taken to collections. In one case, Mr. Speaker, the cabin was actually washed away on the banks of the Mackenzie River. The land isn't even there anymore, much less the cabin, and they're still being taken to collections over their lease.

Yesterday, the Minister stated that leaseholders can apply for a pause on invoicing. If this shouldn't be happening in the first place, why are we asking leaseholders to apply? Are there people out there, Mr. Speaker, that want to pay? And if so, maybe the Minister can pause all and have those who would like to continue to pay apply to do so.

This is taking far too long, Mr. Speaker. People are frustrated. They are suffering financial hardship. Indigenous governments are fed up, and we need to resolve this issue now, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Members' statements. Member from the Deh Cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 556-20(1):
GETTING AHEAD PILOT PROGRAM IN
DEHCHO FIRST NATIONS

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have been talking a lot about educational opportunities in our communities in recent weeks. Today I would like to share with the House an example of how programming in our small communities can make and does work with when right people come together.

The Getting Ahead Pilot, or GAP program, was developed through a collaborative initiative between Aurora College and Deh Cho First Nations. The program was designed to address the need for employment readiness training in Fort Providence, particularly for individuals facing barriers to employment such as lower literacy levels, limited work experience, and a lack of essential workplace skills. The goal was to provide participants with career planning, financial literacy, digital literacy, and workplace safety training to help them transition into the workforce or further education.

The GAP program incorporated courses that are part of Aurora College's curriculum. Successful participants earned academic credits with Aurora College contributing to their ongoing educational pathways. The program was funded through Deh Cho First Nations Indigenous skills and employment training

program, and Aurora College contributed instructional leadership and provided the structured training framework. The GAP program ran for 15 weeks, from September to December 2024.

While it is not a standalone certificate program, participants, who successfully completed their required coursework, earned academic credits with Aurora College which can be applied towards further studies. Seven students successfully completed the program. GAP provided them with valuable workplace skills, career planning tools, and industry recognized safety certifications, increasing their employment prospects.

Mr. Speaker, we need to see more partnerships and outcomes like these in our small communities, meeting people where they're at and providing the needed training to advance academic and employment opportunities. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Members' statements. Member from Monfwi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 557-20(1):
ABSENTEEISM IN NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES SCHOOLS

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: School attendance: Mr. Speaker, Members have recently discussed education in our small communities. The graduation rate in the Northwest Territories fell below 60 percent for 2022-2023 school year. The Government of the Northwest Territories 2022-2023 report notes that attendance rates are trending downwards across the NWT. Attendance is as low as 63.5 percent in small communities, and less than 60 percent of students attend in some grades according to the NWT statistics.

Mr. Speaker, we can blame the pandemic for these declining rates, but this has been happening for over a decade. A 2013 education framework document stated that by grade 4, the average NWT student has already missed half a year of school or two full years by grade 10. These statistics suggest that even students in small communities who graduate will have no higher than a potential grade 10 upon graduation. You cannot finish at a grade 12 level if you miss two years of school.

Mr. Speaker, this is unacceptable. Students need to attend school but in small communities, there are other considerations:

- Busing and getting to the school building;

- Fewer remote learning options; and,
- The need to be on the landlord at different times throughout the year.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment knows there is a divide between small community and urban students. We need to address this barrier and get students in small communities to attend school daily. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 558-20(1):
DECENTRALIZATION IN THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to reflect on what makes the NWT different from other parts of Canada in ways that are both maddening and also beautiful. Even looking to our neighbour territories, each has a more unified sense of identity either because there's a common Indigenous government or the population's concentrated in a capital region. But the NWT has a collection of 33 communities, and it often seems that each one wants to go its own separate way, find its own unique solution, and even sometimes groups divided up within communities want different things.

I think the instinct behind that attitude is, Don't tell us what to do. We don't fit into the mold, and we don't want to follow the rules that are imposed upon us by anyone whether that person is in Ottawa or Yellowknife or in a regional centre. That attitude sometimes blocks us from working together, finding common purpose, and actually accomplishing anything, and that's the maddening part. But I also have to say, Mr. Speaker, that that very thing is a big part of why I live here and why I could never live anywhere else.

Many of us have chosen this place as or adopted home precisely because we found a place with more freedom from the kinds of rules and constraints that we would have found down south. It's somewhere to spread your wings, do things your own way, go ahead and take the initiative instead of waiting for the instructions or the protocols to be established. There is so many beautiful and also practical things that can be created from this urge to colour outside the lines and step outside the box.

There's constant tension in the NWT between people's urge for uniqueness and their desire for standards, between the need for fairness and rules, and also everyone's desire to be the

exception to that rule, between the need for strength in numbers and the need for people to have their own unique voice. Mr. Speaker, this government is caught in those dilemmas, and I don't know a clear way out, but I have a few suggestions.

We need to let go of this dream of creating one set of instructions that all communities are supposed to follow in order to achieve standardized results. It's just never going to work. Instead of starting with the instructions, we need to start by looking at what's actually working in communities never mind how haphazardly they got there. Mr. Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues. We need to stop punishing public servants for trying to step outside their silos and boxes, and we need to stop thinking of decentralization as simply taking this one set of instructions and delivering those from a regional centre instead of from Yellowknife. I believe we can find a way forward, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to us working through it. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Members' statements. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 559-20(1):
CONDITION OF DETTAH ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL BUILDING

MR. EDJERICON: Mr. Speaker, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which passed through the previous Assembly, outlines the right for self-government participation and decision-making and free prior and informed consent for Indigenous people. Article 23 states that the Indigenous people have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising the right to develop; in particular, the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing, and other economic and social programs. However, the Department of Infrastructure and ECE continues to not consult with Yellowknives Dene First Nation leadership on the capital needs especially when it comes to upgrading and replacing their aging school and gymnasium.

For example, Dettah Kaw Tay Whee School was built out of four trailers in 1970 and rapidly aging. The gymnasium that supports that school is not attached and is far too small. Dettah students therefore must bus into Yellowknife if they want to get proper exercise and enjoy recreation activities students in Yellowknife have. J.H. Sissons School in

Yellowknife, meanwhile, was built around the same time as Dettah school but it was completely demolished and rebuilt just a few years ago. The gymnasium in N'dilo also has been long outgrown and doubled as a community hall. The community has long been calling for a new larger gymnasium to be built so the old facility can be retrofitted into space for community programming. I, and my predecessor, have been working to get this project on to the capital plan to no success. Assessments and evaluations seem to have taken place in the last decade but have not yet amounted to any meaningful progress.

My communities know what's best in their -- what they need for the community but, so far, they have not been listened to. I am now calling on the Minister of Infrastructure to get these projects onto the capital plan to build as soon as possible. I hope to secure a clear commitment from the Minister later on today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife South.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 560-20(1):
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE SCHOLARSHIP
WINNERS

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, over the next few days I will be giving statements to celebrate the achievements of some Yellowknife South constituents. I would like to start off by recognizing two individuals who have successfully achieved scholarships and will now be supported by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment in their journey towards strengthening, revitalizing, and promoting Indigenous languages in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker I would like to congratulate Marie Speakman as she pursues studies in the language of Sahtu Dene Kede and Ryann Hendrickson as she pursues studies in ne hiyawe win, also known as Cree. They are two of the ten recipients who received the Indigenous language revitalization scholarships earlier this year that were awarded during Indigenous Language Month last month.

Mr. Speaker, I wish them both, of course, the very best on their language journeys and would also like to encourage folks from both Yellowknife South, as well as from across the Northwest Territories, to apply on the program next year. Learning an Indigenous language is not only about preserving the words; it is about preserving and nurturing cultural diversity,

healing, and reconciliation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Members' statements.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 561-20(1):
PAUL STIPDONK MEMORIAL SOCCER
TOURNAMENT

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Colleagues, the Paul Stipdonk Memorial Soccer Tournament in Fort Simpson is not just a sporting event; it is a celebration of community spirit, resilience, and the love of soccer. Held annually in memory of Paul Stipdonk, a passionate advocate for youth sports and community development, the tournament brings together teams from across the Mackenzie Region, fostering camaraderie and healthy competition.

This tournament serves as a platform for young athletes to showcase their skills and develop their talents. It emphasizes the importance of teamwork and sportsmanship, values that Paul championed throughout his life. Participants range from seasoned players who are in grade 3 to 7 to newcomers who are grades junior kindergarten to grade 2, creating an inclusive environment where everyone can learn and grow. The event also attracts families and supporters, turning the tournament into a vibrant community gathering filled with laughter, encouragement, and shared experiences.

Beyond the community gym, the tournament has a significant impact on the youth that are participating and the community of Fort Simpson. The influx of visitors from Hay River Reserve and Lutselk'e to this event encourages new friendships in the region. As well, the youth get treated to amazing meals by the local speedskating club. Additionally, the tournament features workshops and clinics held by experienced coaches and older athletes from the community, providing valuable learning opportunities for aspiring players.

Moreover, the Paul Stipdonk Memorial Soccer Tournament highlights the importance of youth engagement in sports as a means of promoting healthy lifestyles. It encourages young people to stay active, develop friendships, and build a sense of belonging within their community. The legacy of Paul Stipdonk lives on through this tournament, inspiring future generations to pursue their passions both on and off the field. In this way, the event transcends mere competition, becomes a cornerstone of community identity and pride in Fort Simpson.

This year's tournament was held on Friday, January 10 to Sunday the 12th. And I was

fortunate enough to be able to attend and witness the youth have a great time. I know Paul was proudly looking down on the youth that weekend.

We would like to thank the Stipdonk family, Mackenzie rec association, the Village of Fort Simpson, Fort Simpson speedskating club, Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, and all the volunteers for their continued support.

Members' statements. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Returns to oral questions. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake

Oral Questions

QUESTION 584-20(1): SAFETY OF STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL STAFF

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Health and Social Services about the recent very serious situation that happened at Stanton Territorial Hospital. The code that was called was a code white which means everyone from each department attends on -- at the site, what actually led to increasing risk to safety of those people who did attend. Other hospitals have code silvers which means shelter in place, more or less. Can the Minister -- and these issues have been raised with hospital management. Can the Minister explain why we don't have a code silver in place at Stanton Territorial Hospital? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just to the code silver, there is a draft code silver policy that's been developed and since the beginning of this year, the policy is currently being reviewed by various stakeholders including the occupational health and safety and other various teams. Next steps will be to ask the RCMP to review. And then it will be circulated more broadly for feedback. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure health care workers are relieved to hear that. When does the Minister plan to have that fully in place? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: As this work is ongoing, Mr. Speaker, I can ensure that, you know -- that we, and I -- and I think any Member

in this House -- do want to take health and safety of any of our public service very seriously. And so with this work that's going on, I don't have the exact details of when these things will happen but as I get more information from that, I can provide that in writing to Members as they wish and to the Member that's asking. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that commitment.

Mr. Speaker, another issue is the security at Stanton do not have the resources that they need to deal with situations like that. Is the Minister willing to review the security complement at the Stanton Territorial Hospital and ensure that they are properly resourced to deal with future violence at the ER?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know, and I appreciate that the Member is highlighting this. This is something that, you know, we always think that we live in a little bubble up here in the North and these kind of things are not going to happen to us but as I was in Halifax, there was another serious incident that happened there while we were there. And, you know, I hear it from my colleagues in Hay River, you know, the staff there are worried about the safety. And so we take this very seriously. And there is ongoing work right now learning from this specific incident, and any other incidents before but, you know, highlighting that the place that we're living right now with guns and violence and the toxic drugs that are affecting all of our communities now, we are looking at this and some improving and ongoing doing this work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

QUESTION 585-20(1): LAND LEASES IN THE INUVIALUIT SETTLEMENT REGION

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, following up on my Member's statement, and Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister's live to this issue, I know the Minister cares about this issue. My first question is what are we doing and when are we finally going to resolve this issue of cabin leases in settled land claim areas? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, this has been an area that has been top of mind for me. It was one of my priorities, my personal priorities when I came into the Assembly and became Minister, and there's been a lot of work done within the department. I certainly, much like the Member, would like to see the pace moving a little quicker than it is but, you know, very aware of the capacity of not only the department but the Indigenous governments to move this forward. We have a number of initiatives going. We've addressed a way to engage so that we can look at the program as a whole, and we've sent letters out. We have a meeting scheduled for early May to discuss some options. And, again, as I've stated before it's very important to me that we get the perspectives and the input from all of the Indigenous governments across the NWT to ensure that we're looking out for everyone's interest as we move forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know, we must commit to respecting the IFA, certainly in the Inuvialuit settlement area, and our obligations under this implementation. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister speak to any specific legislation that would have to be changed to make this happen? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as we are currently working through the process, we are working with -- through the Intergovernmental Council on land tenure on -- oh sorry, the Intergovernmental Council on land and resource management through the legislative development protocol. And as we're doing this, we're working on the establishment of finalizing the regulations toward the land tenure issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Final supplementary. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the Minister for that. I don't think I got a specific piece of legislation in there, and I'd note that now is not the time to negotiate; now is the time, again, to respect the legislation and the rules and the Indigenous agreements that are in place.

With that, Mr. Speaker, would the Minister once again commit to pausing all invoicing and all

collections until this issue is finally resolved? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And apologies to the Member for my little stumble there. Currently we are working on reducing -- potentially reducing rents for Indigenous leaseholders that have traditional harvesting rights to potentially a dollar. Unfortunately, under the current legislation we're unable to go to zero. Certainly, we have the program in place, which came into force in 2023 which we've extended now, to pause collection on outstanding lease arrears. And we're certainly, you know, want to do everything we can as a department to work with all of the Indigenous governments across the NWT to ensure that we can, you know, support the implementation of those programs and happy to continue with that down that road and ensure that we are, you know, trying to get everyone to come over and sign up for the program that's interested in having their arrears paused. And if there are groups out there that would need additional assistance, happy to work on that as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Oral questions. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

QUESTION 586-20(1):
RENTAL INCREASES IN COMMUNITIES
FOR GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES WORKERS

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are only a few units -- market housing units within each of the communities throughout the NWT. They're housing our professional resource people who are coming into our communities to assist in healing our residents. We have limited housing available within our smaller communities, and this is the only option some of our resource people may have. Has the department looked at other options to increase revenue rather than imposing a rent increase on only a select few? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time, the department is considering a number of different options to increase revenues with Housing NWT. But market rental rates have not changed since 2012, 2013, and this is a possible -- this is a possible revenue for Housing NWT because it does subsidize our public housing units. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of these market housings are quite old and past its life span. Some of them are 50 years old, and imposing rent increases on tenants from these units is uncalled for. Will the department be increasing the rent on the same basis as the newer units, or will they be based on the condition of each unit? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, good news to report, most of the market housing rentals in the Northwest Territories are 20 years or less. The Government of the Northwest Territories started investing in market housing in the early 2000s. So most of them are 20 years or less, so much better condition than our public housing units. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Final supplementary. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll forego my third question and repeat my second question. Will the department be increasing the rent on the same basis as the newer units as the 50-year-old units that we do have in our communities? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A difficult question and thank you to the Member for the question. This is the same type of question that I've asked Housing NWT. Considering the conditions of units across the Northwest Territories, utilize the unit condition rating, but at this time the expectation is that they would be the same across the board. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Oral questions. Member from Frame Lake.

QUESTION 587-20(1):
ACCESS TO PRIMARY HEALTHCARE IN
THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of health, and it's quite simple. Mr. Speaker, what is our goal for primary care in the NWT?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, to answer the Member's question, there have been systemic barriers in the health and social services system preventing Indigenous people from accessing the primary and community health care services they need. This results in disparity in health and wellness outcomes.

These services could be delivered through team-based models of care that are responsive to their values and priorities. Therefore, a vision has been established, in collaboration with Indigenous communities, to address these disparities and focus on equity. And the department is committed to realizing this vision where Northwest Territories is a place where Indigenous people, including 2SLGBTQIPA+ individuals enjoy optimal physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and wellness. So the goal of primary health care reform is to ensure that all residents have access to culturally safe, team-based, primary and community care, and then to establish integrated care pathways to support seamless integration and continuity across various health and social services and levels of care. So we are mobilizing health and social services system staff and external shareholders to pursue that transformative community-driven approach to primary and community care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that incredibly detailed answer. My next question is, Mr. Speaker, if that is our goal, why have we not clearly articulated it -- and I might suggest being a bit more brief -- in the business plans? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know, the business plans -- and I agree, sometimes when we get into the beginning of how we're going to do things in a new government, it's very -- in a way, may I say vague as to how we're going to get these things done. But I -- you know, and that's one of the reasons why I think just recently I sent a letter to the committee on a briefing for the primary health care reform which will be able to dive deep into some of the work that the department is doing and for Members to be able to ask questions and get the information that they need in a better way. And I encourage the Members to reach out to us to schedule that briefing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that offer. Certainly, I'll talk to my colleagues, and hopefully we accept that briefing.

Mr. Speaker, it's great to have a goal, but we also need to know when are we trying to achieve it by. So I appreciate that we are working to have equitable access for all NWT residents to primary care. I would suggest that we add the word universal, meaning

everybody, has that access. But, Mr. Speaker, when are we -- when is that goal going to be achieved; when do we anticipate being able to tell every resident in the NWT that they have equitable access to health care? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as we're all aware, health is every day of our life there's somebody that needs to access it. So as we are transforming through this, every person in the Northwest Territories has access to care, you know, whether it's through the walk-in clinics, whether it's through 811, whether it's through our emergency departments, when you get out to the small community there are the health centres and the regional centres, we have the emergency departments. You know, everybody has access to care. As through this transformation, this is work that is going to be ongoing, and I do not want to rush something and -- you know, and put the burden on, pressure on our staff. There's been a lot of changes just in this past year, and that change management has -- we have had some struggles with that. So we need to take it a day at a time and making sure that our staff are comfortable and understanding how we're changing the way that we're providing care to the Northwest Territories residents. So at this time right now, I won't say that this will be done X amount of days. I think as we move forward through this process, you know, it will be our residents saying, you know, that they're feeling that the system is changing, and that is the most important piece. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

QUESTION 588-20(1):
ACCESSIBILITY OF PRIMARY CARE

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to my colleague for setting me up for questions that a little bit more granular than his.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell me how many primary care same-day appointments are available in both Yellowknife locations? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, same-day appointments are available in both the Liwego'ati Building and at the primary care centre location. That's the downtown location. There are approximately 24 available same-day appointments Monday to Friday which are offered during expanded

hours until 9 p.m., and there are approximately 18 available same-day appointments on Saturday available from 10 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. Same-day appointments can be booked by calling first thing in the morning or by walk-in to the primary care centre. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that. That's eye opening.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister confirm that diagnostic imaging and lab services are still also available and first come/first serve at downtown primary care? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, outpatient lab collection services in Yellowknife that are provided at the primary care centre and at -- and they are provided at the primary care centre and at Stanton Hospital. In the fall of 2024, Stanton Hospital changed their lab services to an appointment only model, but I can confirm that there are reserved appointments for those who receive urgent same-day requests to seek this service. And, Mr. Speaker, the lab service offered at the downtown primary care clinic include walk-in and same-day option and a waitlist option. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Member from Great Slave. Final supplementary.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that when you call for a same-day appointment in Yellowknife, you are assigned one location or the other, downtown or uptown. Can the Minister tell me how -- how same-day primary care appointments locations are selected and provided to someone who is calling in? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, the same-day appointments are available at the Liwego'ati and Yellowknife Primary Care locations. There is one phone number to book appointments for both locations, and people are told which location they'll have an appointment when they book if it is the same day. These appointments are filled on a first come/first serve basis, and the location where you would go would be determined by the number of providers working that day and where they are working.

Mr. Speaker, we know that access to primary care is essential for maintaining overall health and well-being but knowing when and where to seek care is just as important. Primary care providers are often the first point of contact for medical concerns, offering routine checkups,

preventative care, chronic condition management, and referrals to specialists when needed. However, not every health issue requires a visit to your primary care provider. In many cases, other health care professionals, like pharmacists or even telehealth services like 811, can provide the care you need. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

QUESTION 589-20(1):
CONDITION OF DETTAH ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I talked about the Kaw Tay Whee School in Dettah. That school would be 55 years old now, and it's four trailers put together. Mr. Speaker, the children have to walk probably about 300 yards to go to the gymnasium. This school needs to be replaced. My question would be to the Minister of Infrastructure. There was a study that was done in 2018, 2019. Can the Minister of Infrastructure let us know what was the study about and who was all involved in the study? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to need a bit of time to suss out exactly what study this is referencing from 2018, 2019. I'm happy to do so. It may be that I'm leaning on my colleague from education, culture and employment. When it comes to the capital planning for educational facilities, it is a team effort. We rely on ECE to determine their programming needs and then, of course, the team at infrastructure supports them with respect to capital planning standards and then moving through the process. So, again, happy to look into this and to report back to the House and to the Member. Thank you.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I guess my question to the Minister is that now that the study is undertaken in 2018 and 2019, once she has this information, my question would be is can we look at a new way to look at this report and start working with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation chief and council and the local DEA to look at what the needs are for that community for fall 2025 capital plan process? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly happy to continue to work with the chief from the community. That's not -- this is not an issue that he has raised with me directly on previous

occasions but certainly happy to open that conversation with them.

Mr. Speaker, the capital planning process is a fairly detailed one. There are several criteria by which projects are judged to determine which ones move forward. Existing schools go through regular assessments every five years to determine where they might fall in terms of their needs. New capital projects similarly go through an assessment. There's standards and criteria that apply to all educational facilities. So there's quite a -- there's certainly a very robust system to ensure that we are ensuring that all the 33 communities have access to good educational facilities. Happy to go through that with the Member and with the chief and the community and see where the facilities in these communities fall. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Final supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I just want to emphasize that education is a treaty right, and it's also in the -- recognized in the UNDRIP document. So having said that, I guess looking forward to work with the department to work with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and also the DEA in Dettah so that we are able to finally get a new school in Dettah and with a full-sized gymnasium. And my question to the Minister is that when can we start working together with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and the local DEA on this issue? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'll draw on another positive example which is to say that in the community of Behchoko, there was a longstanding challenge of the school there and a desire to see that school changed and moved from the site where it was previously put to a new community. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment as lead, with support from infrastructure, are now working with Tlicho government going to Ottawa to advocate for education. Mr. Speaker, I would be very happy to see that we can get to a place where another Indigenous government, together with the GNWT, are able to advocate for better education in their community, and I am happy to meet with the chiefs to work towards that goal. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 590-20(1):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES RESPONSE
TO UNITED STATES TARIFFS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today it's a fairly momentous day in the Canada-US trade relationship. Donald Trump has imposed his tariffs, and Canadians are reeling from the consequences. Markets are reeling from the consequences. And our future is increasingly uncertain. I know the Premier's been front and center with Team Canada on protecting our nation's interests and Northerner's interests. Can he provide an update to this House now that these tariffs are a reality. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Mr. Premier.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. we have all heard the news that the President of the United States has decided to implement tariffs on Canada and Mexico. Prime Minister Trudeau has stated that he has initiated counter tariffs on our side of the border and with additional counter tariffs coming in a few weeks, depending on how things go. For our part here in the Northwest Territories, we've directed the NWT Liquor and Cannabis Commission to cease all procurement of American products. We have directed the department to refrain from procuring anything from American companies wherever possible. We're looking at how to end our contracts with Starlink. And we're going to continue to do anything else we can to support Team Canada and Canadians and Northerners. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said that this epp today, shockingly, I think, that this effort of this -- of this trade war is to weaken Canada's economy to make it easier for the Americans to annex us into the 51st State. These are very shocking comments. Has the Premier been able to speak to the Prime Minister and just get a sense of how real that threat it? The NWT is, of course, in the Arctic, and that's a prize for the Americans clearly. Is this -- how serious is this threat, and what are we doing to prepare for it? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we've had almost weekly conversations, all the Premiers and the Prime Minister. I actually had to leave the call early to come down to the House today, so we were just meeting. And I don't think there's a lot of nuance in what the President has to say about annexing Canada. I think if you read what he's saying and if you listen to what he says, it sounds like he's serious about it. And I think that people across Canada in all levels of government now realize that, and we need to do what we can to ensure that, you know, we stay united and we stay strong economically. We don't want the Americans to be able to use economic force or

coercion to weaken our federation to the point that, you know, we are at risk of annexation. And, frankly, Mr. Speaker, I don't see that happening. I don't -- I can't imagine a world where the Americans are in control of Canada. It's just not something that I think any of us can fathom. It doesn't mean that we won't need to protect against that possibility and that we as Canadians, you know, we might have to put up with some pain based on these tariffs. It might be a difficult few years for us. But I know that we're going to stay united, and we're going to resist. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm really appreciative of these comments and the Premier's leadership on this. Premier Ford today also said he would do absolutely everything to protect Ontarians and Canadians, tearing up contracts, putting surcharges on energy, barring critical minerals. Is the Premier willing to pay any price to protect Canada and the Northwest Territories' sovereignty? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I listened to what Premier Ford has to say sometimes, and I wish I was able to say a lot of those same things, but the fact is we don't have that type of economy. We don't have those types of direct exports to the United States to be able to make those types of threats. We're not currently exporting any critical minerals to the United States, and so we're in a much different position. That being said, I'm confident that as Canadians we can come together, and we can both support Canadian businesses and ensure that the Americans are feeling the negative impacts of boycotts and of the counter tariffs so that we can overcome the situation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Oral questions. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

QUESTION 591-20(1):
RENTAL INCREASES IN COMMUNITIES
FOR GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES WORKERS

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have one question to conclude my questions from the previous. Will the department look at consulting with the tenants of market housing, not just sending a letter but, you know, meeting with the tenants of the communities because consultation is key. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question. The local housing authorities and the district offices are always available to talk to clients about market housing needs in their communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Housing NWT. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

QUESTION 592-20(1):
ACCESSIBILITY OF PRIMARY CARE

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Social Services. After hearing her answers to questions today, does the Minister agree that equity to health care includes accessibility to health care? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, you know, this is something I talked to the Minister about quite a bit. So can the Minister commit to looking during this primary care reform period into how we allot spaces between the two Yellowknife locations for same-day services? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 593-20(1):
STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL
GRIDLOCK

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am hearing that patients are being more or less warehoused in waiting rooms in the hospital. They're spending days on stretchers in an overcrowded emergency department. Hospital continues to be on gridlock, meaning care is delayed, tensions run high, and safety risks multiple. What is the Minister doing to address gridlock at Stanton Territorial Hospital? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since May 2024, Stanton Territorial Hospital has been gridlocked of an average of 10 to 15 days per month. So

each day Stanton has an average of five patients in the emergency department waiting for a bed in the in-patient unit. For the past year, Stanton has been sitting at or above 100 percent capacity. As a result of no available beds for admission, Stanton has had to open extra beds in the ICU three to five days per month to treat and discharge emergency room patients. There are nine acute care beds that are currently occupied by patients who could be discharged to an altered level of care, such as out of territory services and long-term care, and these patients are at various stages of planning for those placements. On average, five to eight surgical procedures per month have had to be cancelled due to the lack of available beds for post-operative care as results gridlocks on numerous admissions in the ER. And, Mr. Speaker, what is this government doing? What is the Minister doing?

Well, the Minister is looking at -- you know, looking at how are we supporting our small communities and how are we supporting our regional centres? Because many of these people that are sitting in our emergency departments are medevacs that are coming in from small communities. Our hospital in the regions are at capacity as well. And so there's much work that needs to be done on the outlying to support people to -- you know, to have access to care sooner so that it's reducing the amount that's needed on in-patient care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, half a month your hospital's gridlocked, that's not a favourable statistic. Mr. Speaker, the Minister talked about providing support to regional health care and health care centres to release the pressure on Stanton. So how are these -- how have these efforts in regional centres had an effect on gridlock at Stanton? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as this is ongoing work that's happening and reviewing the model of health care centres and many of these things, these things are going to take time. I understand that the hospital is gridlocked. We're holding patients here because there's gridlocks even in the south happening. So this is something that is affecting us all across the system. So what we're doing is we're working diligently. You know, we've opened up more beds in the Liwego'ati Building and therefore those patients that need to go into -- you know, in long-term care, we're getting more spaces open for that. You know, and it takes all of us to try and -- you know, and reach out to our health care providers sooner. And, yes, we hear that it's a struggle but, you know, these are the things that we need to be -- we're focusing on

and trying to change the way that we're doing things and looking at the frontline services and where things are going to be needed. And those are the things that maybe, you know, in this next year are going to have to change. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Member from Range Lake. Final supplementary.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm hearing the same concerns, the same energy to solve them, but I'm not -- I'm light on details. So I'll put it another way. The public administrator's been in place for some time now. He's got an expansive mandate to solve these problems. What is the public administrator doing to address gridlock? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the public administrator, yes, he is in place, and he is working on his mandate, and there are other things in his mandate that are -- that have been higher prioritized right now, and those are the things that he's focused on. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

Notices of Motion

MOTION 48-20(1):
REAPPOINTMENT OF CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

MR. EDJERICON: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Thursday, March 6th, 2025, I will move the following motion:

Now therefore I move, second by the honourable Member from Yellowknife South, that this Legislative Assembly, by virtue of Section 5 of the Elections and Plebiscite Act, recommends to the Commissioner, the appointment of Mr. Stephen Dunbar of Yellowknife as the chief electoral officer for the Northwest Territories for a fixed term commencing on a date to be communicated by the Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time I will be seeking unanimous consent to deal with this motion today. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Notices of motion. Member from Range Lake.

MOTION 49-20(1):
COMPASSIONATE MEDICAL EVACUATION POLICY

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Thursday, March 6th, 2025, I will move the following motion:

Now therefore I move, seconded by the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, that this Legislative Assembly calls upon the Government of the Northwest Territories to develop and implement a compassionate medical evacuation policy for our emergency ground/air ambulance and highway rescue allowing for patients in critical conditions to be accompanied by non-medical escorts. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Notices of motion. Member from Great Slave.

MOTION 50-20(1):
APPOINTMENT OF PERSON TO INVESTIGATE THE CRITICAL INCIDENT OF AVERY BURKE, WESLEY MARCELLAIS AND HILLARY NORWEGIAN

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Thursday, March 6th, 2025, I will move the following motion:

Now therefore I move, seconded by the Member for Deh Cho, that the Minister of Health and Social Services appoints a person to investigate the incident of the treatment of Avery Burke, Wesley Marcellais, and Hillary Norwegian;

And further, that the Minister of Health and Social Services table before the Assembly at the earliest opportunity any recommendations that the investigator includes in their investigation report alongside a plan to advance such recommendations;

And furthermore, that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to this motion within 120 days. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Notices of motion. Motions. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

Motions

MOTION 48-20(1):
REAPPOINTMENT OF CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER,
CARRIED

MR. EDJERICON: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to deal with the motion I gave notice of earlier today.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. The Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh is seeking unanimous consent to bring forward his motion today. Seeing no nays, you may bring forward your motion.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, colleagues.

WHEREAS the Elections and Plebiscites Act provides for the appointment of a chief electoral officer who has the responsibility to exercise general direction and supervision over the administrative conduct of an election and enforce, on the part of all election officers, fairness, impartiality and compliance with the Elections and Plebiscites Act;

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Yellowknife South, that this Legislative Assembly, by virtue of Section 5 of the Elections and Plebiscites Act, recommends to the Commissioner the reappointment of Mr. Stephen Dunbar of Yellowknife as chief electoral officer for the Northwest Territories for a fixed term commencing on a date to be communicated by the Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. The motion is in order. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. Does the Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh wish to close the debate? Thank you. All those in favour, please. Opposed? Abstentions? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Motions. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Tabled Document 275-20(1), with the Member from the Deh Cho in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): I will now call the Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of the committee? The Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the committee wishes to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1),

2025-2026 Main Estimates, the Department of Environment and Climate Change. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Does the committee agree? Thank you, committee. We will take a short recess and resume with the first item.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates. We will now consider the Department of Environment and Climate Change. Does the Minister of Environment and Climate Change wish to bring witnesses into the House?

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, please, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses into the chamber.

Would the Minister please introduce his witnesses.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. On my left, I have deputy minister Robert Jenkins. And on my right, I have Jessica St. Arnaud, the director of finance. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. The committee has agreed to forego general comments on the Department of Environment and Climate Change. Does the committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabled document?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Committee, we will defer the departmental summary and review the estimates by activity summary beginning with corporate management starting on page 83 with information items on page 86. Are there any questions? Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. So I'm just going to quickly flip through the activities to make sure this is a good question; I believe it is. I know that the department has done restructuring in recent years. Can the Minister speak a little bit to the role of ADM regional operations now that that key activity has been sort of subsumed into the other activities? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will pass that to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister.

MR. ROBERT JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. So the ADM regional operations primarily deals with the enforcement functions across the department. So there's -- we have regional offices in every region. We have enforcement functions under land, under water, under wildlife, and so the various aspects for that fall to ADM regional operations. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, could I get a little bit more substantiation around why that as a function was removed however, like why that was made as an organizational choice? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. ROBERT JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I mean, I think we've got quite a bit. Previous there was ADM role also held aspects of fire, forest management, wildlife in terms of the science and other aspects, quite a large portfolio. By having a new ADM regional operations, you've got some separation there as well for sensitive matters such as enforcement which really is an area that upon which itself in terms of being dealt with under those enforcement functions in our -- the legal aspects of this, so some separation there is positive in that space. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thanks. Yeah, I'm going to have questions about the reorg throughout, but I will save them for the other applicable sections.

Can the department provide additional details on the transfer of the surface rights boards. What were the main drivers of this change? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll pass that to the director of finance.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Director St. Arnaud.

MS. JESSICA ST. ARNAUD: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's just an administrative process change. So the director used administer the contribution agreement, and now finance will. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. What benefit is the reasoning behind that change? I assume managing by finance is a more administratively streamline, but I'd love for a further explanation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, that is correct, it's just administratively more streamlined. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you. And just one last question on this. The budget reallocation of approximately \$34,000, what does that fund cover? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, that covers the UNW increase. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Now go to Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: I'm done. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I just want to continue on my now annual plug for the old Northwest Territories environmental audit. I note in the business plans that there's going to be a 2025 audit. I think the update, it says that they've commenced work on it. And I note that the target in the business plan -- and if they're looking for a page number, it's page 79 of the document, page 35. I'm not sure which of those pages is actually the relevant page. There's two page numbers on the document. So -- but anyways, the point being that the business plan target is that 2025 audit recommendations are addressed.

Just noting that the department did not manage to implement all of the recommendations from the previous audit as of the initiation of the 2025 audit, I'd just like to ask if the department is interested in establishing a target date for when those 2025 audit recommendations are going to be addressed. And, again, I'm going to ask if the department is adequately resourced. It's going to be a bit harder to answer this question because I don't know if we have the audit yet, but if the department is adequately resourced to carry out the recommendations of the audit in a timely manner. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for the question. At this time, it would be difficult to get a -- give a firm commitment on all of the items. Some of them are ongoing in nature, but we are certainly happy to come back to the Member individually and provide an update on each item and the recommendations. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Okay, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just going to gently push back a little bit. I mean, I do note that -- you know, I'm going to go -- every single department is going to get the targets and measurable outcome speech, and I don't want to spare ECC from this speech.

Without measurable outcomes and without targets, it's hard for us to know when we're achieving something. So it's also hard to know how much of a priority it is for the department. So I want to state for myself implementation of the audit recommendations are important, and I think they are critical to the mandate commitment that this government has made to streamline regulatory. So I think we've been struggling to articulate what exactly we even mean by streamlining, and I think that the audit gives us a great place to start. The recommendations that come from that audit are recommendations that come from talking to various people involved in the system and an expert analysis of things that may need to change in the system, and that's where we can get that information. So if we don't make implementation of the audit a priority, I don't think that we can achieve the priority that we've set. So I would like to see the department come back in a reasonable amount of time -- it's going to take some assessment of the audit and the recommendations in it, but come back to the House and let us know, you know, when they intend to -- or give us a timeline for each audit recommendation as to when the department

thinks they can reasonably implement the recommendation. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you to the Member for the points here. I will certainly come back and respond to each of the recommendations when the 2025 audit is released, if the Member would like to ask for them again then. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I can certainly make that commitment, and we'll continue to keep the pressure on the department as I think -- yeah, I -- I've made my point. But if we're talking about streamlining; we're talking about, you know, a high functioning regulatory system that we can be proud of, the audit is the key and so I'll keep the pressure on on that matter. I think that's all I wanted to say about the business plans. I do want to keep a focus on that for now. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change, do you want to respond to that?

HON. JAY MACDONALD: I'll take that as a comment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Seeing no further questions. Please turn to page 84, Environment and Climate Change, corporate management, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$14,530,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Moving on to environment management, monitoring and climate change, beginning on page 87 with information items on page 91. Are there any questions? Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to return to the climate change action plan. In the draft plan, some of the actions appear to be funded but, in fact -- well, so 78 of the actions appear to be funded but 20 of the actions are only partially funded and 23 of the actions appear to be completely unfunded. Can the Minister explain whether all of the funding to implement the climate change action plan, is that located in one of these line items, or is it sort of sprinkled across the budget? I'll start

there with my question. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we haven't released the action plan yet, and as we try and work within our current fiscal reality we're working on prioritization of those items, so the funding at times will be reallocated from within. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Madam Chair. So I guess my next question is there are clearly some items that are at least being contemplated in the action plan that we're not prepared to fund. Can the Minister explain why we would put items into our own action plan but not put aside the funding to actually action them? What's the point of having actions in our own action plan that we can't do because we won't fund them? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the items within the action plan and the action plan itself is a document that we're using to work with the Government of Canada in our approach to get additional funding to support some of those items that are currently not funded. But I'd like to pass to the deputy minister for a little more detail. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. ROBERT JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. So the climate change action plan lays out a number of actions, and obviously, we're working with a number of partners, Indigenous governments, other levels of governments, and other organizations to advance the work that we need to do to address the challenges of climate change. One of the things that we've heard through discussions with Canada is that they often like clarity in a document that our government with actions that we feel need to be taken in our jurisdiction, and that's something that they can then use in their own approvals for funding requests to be able to allocate their funding. So in many ways, some of the actions that we lay, we want to be able to lay out the actions that we need, and then it is -- provides us an opportunity to point to a document for discussions with other funders. We know we get substantive funding from other jurisdictions, and they appreciate having it in a document

when we have those conversations. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Is there any way to -- does the Minister have a total number or amount of money that we're proposing to spend in this budget on climate change actions; have you tried totalling that? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, \$2.6 million. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thanks to the Minister for that. That's somewhere to start and continue our conversations.

I wanted to turn to a few other questions I have on this section. Can the Minister explain why under environmental protection and waste management -- so the number allocated clearly drops significantly between 2023-2024, and then last year down from \$4.8 million down to about \$3 million, and now we're back up to \$4.1 million. Can the Minister explain why there is such big fluctuations from year to year in the amount allocated for that? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the increase of 485K between the 2024-2025 revised main estimates and the 2025-2026 Main Estimates is due to an increase in the expanded waste sites federal agreement, a reduction to travel, and controllable assets, collective bargaining increases, and amortization adjustment, and the decrease to the one-time supplementary appropriation. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Is it fair to conclude that the number has gone up and down so much from year to year because of variations in federal funding for certain programs; is that correct to conclude? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, Madam Chair, that is a good explanation, and there's a one-off due to the collective bargaining in 2024-2025. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Is the Minister able to explain, you know, in plain language for most of us, because most of us are not experts, but what -- what we're not able to do this year because of changes in federal funding or what new things we're able to do? Like, if we're quite reliant here on federal funding, can the Minister, you know, explain in a nutshell what kinds of things we're not doing this year or new things we might be doing due to federal funding changes? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll pass that to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. ROBERT JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. So one of the areas is the excepted waste sites. We've got an agreement with Canada that expires, I believe, in March 31st, 2026, and so we're in the process of sort of negotiating dollars for some of the historic accepted sites that are included in the devolution agreement. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay. Thanks for that. That's something we can follow up on in our discussions.

Under the transboundary waters -- the line item under transboundary waters, can the Minister explain why last year's revised estimates went way up to \$1.18 million. Perhaps just jog our memory, and then why we're back down to 285 for this coming year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll pass that to director St. Arnaud. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Director St. Arnaud.

MS. ST. ARNAUD: Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. So the biggest thing with transboundary is there's a transboundary bilateral water management agreement with a few different provinces, and those groups meet frequently to decide what projects they're going to be doing. So that budget will fluctuate based on availability of contractors, coming up plans for the next fiscal year. So you'll see every year the revised will be different as we load a certain amount of money for those projects each year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: It's still with North.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Yellowknife North, sorry.

MS. MORGAN: We do share a lake. Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the Minister give any more specifics on what happened last year that cost the \$1.18 million under transboundary waters. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'll pass to director St. Arnaud.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Director St. Arnaud.

MS. ST. ARNAUD: Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. I don't have specifics on me right now, so we'll have to get back to the Member on that question. Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. So I'll -- my final question here, my colleague was talking about the environmental audit, and we see here that there's no money at least listed in the budget to cover the cost of doing the NWT environmental audit. And my impression was that this was a year when we were going to be doing a new audit. Can the Minister explain whether we are intending to do the environmental audit independent review this coming year, and if so, where the money's going to be coming from. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, that specific item is under the accumulative impact monitoring program, and it's part of the \$3.65 million. I will pass to

deputy minister Jenkins to provide a little bit more detail. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. So just to give a little bit of status update on the 2025 audit, so we will be doing some engagement up until the end of March, then the auditor will be preparing and drafting the final report -- sorry, engagement happened last year. The auditor is still preparing and drafting the report. We hope that we would have a final audit report and recommendations released to the public this October. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Next, I have Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am curious about the status of the negotiations for the excepted waste sites. Could we get an update on those sites. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll pass to deputy minister Jenkins. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. So we're still in the negotiations on responsibility for the excepted waste sites, and these include Burwash, Crystal Run, Ptarmigan, *Rodson, and Tom mines. Most of these are -- sorry, all of these are located outside of Yellowknife. So we are receiving some funding from Canada to refine previous assessments and cost estimates, and we are looking at -- we're required to do sort of remedial action plans, and so those discussions are still underway. We do hope that next fiscal we're able to advance this towards a point of -- where we have some more clarity on the outcomes of those discussions and can sort of move forward on addressing some of the issues at these sites. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you. And by next fiscal, do you mean 2026-2027? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. We're looking to -- I'm hopeful that we'll have

negotiations for these sites completed in the 2025-2026 fiscal year. Each site and the activities that are done will have to come out with specific timeframes. And we'll be looking at different things like, obviously risk at the sites and whatnot. But hopefully we will have negotiations on the excepted waste sites completed in the 2025-2026 fiscal year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. And Madam Chair, I realize I might not be getting a straightforward answer to this next question, and that's all right, but I just thought I'd ask it anyway. Can the Minister please estimate what the total cost of remediation for these sites will be. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, at this time it would be difficult to speculate on what that number could be as the work is ongoing. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will take that as a substantive in a different way. I am curious, though, I know the department has worked in the past specifically on the Ptarmigan mine site to reduce dust. There's dust suppressant so that the contaminants don't blow around on the highway. Is that work still continuing? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'll pass it to deputy minister, please, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. We did do a dust suppression program back in the summer of 2023 to reduce the wind-blown tailings from the Ptarmigan mine site. This year we are looking at advancing some fencing work and some boulder placement to try to -- we've had some issues with people accessing the site, and so we're looking at addressing some safety concerns this year. And we're also sort of be looking at the need for and the timing, if it is needed, for an additional dust suppression program. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I just -- I note that that is top of mind when folks are headed out on the Ingraham Trail, especially, I think most people who have lived here in the Yellowknife area for a long time have recognized that we have a lot more windy days in the warmer weather and note just would really love to get an update on that from the Minister when it's available. So can the Minister commit to updating committee on that work. Thank you

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, happy to provide an update to the Member when the work has been assigned. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, turning to water management and stewardship, I believe that number has gone down since the revised estimates. Can I clarify if that is due to collective bargaining or another cost pressure. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the decrease was due to a sunset on the CCPN program. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can we spell out the acronym, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. My apologies. Climate Change Preparedness in the North. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, with all of the concern, I would say, in the last few years of Indigenous governments with the watershed coming in from Alberta, can the Minister elaborate if any further dollars are being expended with the Indigenous stewardship committee? I am sorry if I got that

name wrong, but I think you'll know what I mean. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. No, there are no changes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. How often does the committee meet? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't have that level of detail with me right now but happy to follow up with the Member. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. And just one final higher-level question on that. Where are we at with the outstanding transboundary agreements that are not completed with external partners? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'll pass to the deputy minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. So a number of agreements were tied back to the Mackenzie River Basin board, and the only one through that piece that we still need to establish is the agreement with Saskatchewan. And we've had some discussions with them on an intention's document and some draft appendices, and work is underway there. We are also interested and have had conversations with Nunavut about the negotiation of a transboundary agreement. I would say that they are preliminary discussions at best. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Nothing further.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay, next, I have Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Excuse me, two minds think alike here. I was going to ask a question on the NWT environmental audit, but the deputy minister beat me to that. I was simply going to ask how is the audit being utilized to leverage additional federal funding in preparation and adaptation in our NWT territory, but I'm satisfied with the answer given earlier by the deputy minister. I'm glad to see they're taking a proactive approach. They're using all the tools in the toolbox to leverage federal funding. I will save my next question for the appropriate activity. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change, do you want to comment?

HON. JAY MACDONALD: No comment at this time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I'll go to Mackenzie Delta. Member for Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question is in terms of water management and stewardship. It's very important for the Indigenous residents of the Northwest Territories to manage water and look after the water. So can you give me some details on where most of these stewardships are taking place. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'll pass to the deputy minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. ROBERT JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. So definitely a number of activities in this space right across the territory. There's, you know, monitoring of transboundary water bodies. We do that on, you know, the Peel River, the Slave River, the Hay River, the Liard, a number of locations right across the territory. We've also got a community-based monitoring program working with communities to monitor a number of sites across the territory, and we've established, as I mentioned in a previous response, a number of transboundary water agreements and there's monitoring requirements with it. We could follow up with the Member with a -- if his interest is in monitoring locations, we could definitely provide a list of monitoring sites that we undertake across the territory. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Madam Chair. That would sufficient, you know, if there's any water management and stewardships programs taking place within -- in the Mackenzie Delta riding area would be -- any other area where it'll have an impact on the communities would be good knowledge to have.

My next question is around climate change, community adaptation. What kind of projects are entailed in this program here? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, that's included in risk and opportunities assessment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: That's all I have for now. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay, thank you. Next, I have Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. My colleagues have done a fine job on asking most of the questions in this section, but I do have just a couple of high-level.

Just on the funding itself and I believe -- and correct me if I'm wrong -- that the Minister stated that in the climate change accumulative impacts and knowledge, the \$8.3 million, \$2.6 million of that is for the climate action plan. I guess my first question, and again, how much of that is federally funded and how much of that comes out of our coffers, Madam Chair?

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the entire \$2.6 million is GNWT funded. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you. And the total \$8.3 million climate change accumulative impacts and knowledge, is that also, then, the entire budget is GNWT funding?

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. No, Madam Chair, there's accumulative impacts monitoring money in there for \$3.65 million. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you for that; I appreciate that answer. And you look at contract services, Madam Chair, \$3.562 million in there, I'm not sure what level of detail the department has here with them today, but I'm just curious as to how much of those contracted services are done in the NWT versus consulting firms or firms outside the NWT. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we don't -- I don't have that level of detail with me here today. I'm happy to follow up and provide that with the Member. But all of the spending does follow the business incentive plan policy. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you. Yeah, and I appreciate that, and I know the department does follow the business incentive policy; however, the business has to be here and be able to do this kind of work in order for them to qualify for that and if we don't have that expertise in our territory, obviously are we going outside to get it, and if we are, how much of that money we're spending outside. So I appreciate the Minister's response and look forward to getting that update at a later date. Other than that, Madam Chair, I have no further questions in this section. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister for Environment and Climate Change, would you like to comment?

HON. JAY MACDONALD: No further comment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. For the transboundary waters -- and I know that a lot of good questions was asked by Members. So I just wanted to ask the Minister how many active transwater boundary agreements we have in the NWT that's currently active with our neighboring territory and provinces? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Currently we have Alberta, British Columbia, and the Yukon. We're currently negotiating with Saskatchewan and in conversations with Nunavut. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you for the info. Water management and stewardship, my colleagues, they talked about it too as well, and we know that climate change, there is a reduction. I believe he said climate change preparedness program was sunsetted. Was that federal government funding? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, Madam Chair, that was in Arcan funding for our flood mapping project. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: You know, climate change is not something new. It's been recognized by many of our elders in the past before, and it's been discussed over ten years now by a lot of our elders that are no longer here with us. So they've been talking about it for a long time because they've noticed changes from before where from 20, 30 years ago, it's not the same no more. That's what we heard many times by elders. So with that in mind, I just wanted to ask the Minister if -- I know that climate change preparedness program helped many of the communities, so is there any way that that program will be replaced for -- here, it says adaptation plan, it's low. So is there any way in the budget that this program can -- or is it going to be replaced with any other programs? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'll pass to director St. Arnaud, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Director St. Arnaud.

MS. ST. ARNAUD: Madam Chair, that adaptation plan that you see in the main estimates is only the contributions associated with the risk and opportunities assessment program. But we're currently in negotiations for another flood hazard mapping agreement, and

that should be in place for 2025-2026. So in the next main estimates, you'll see it in the revised. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Here I see water research and monitoring aquatics. Okay, the budget has not changed since 2023-2024 fiscal year, and it says it stays consistent all the way up to the next fiscal year. So I just wanted to ask the Minister if -- because it's -- if traditional knowledge are being used, especially with water research and monitoring and is the government -- Indigenous government or Indigenous organization are consulted as well? Because I know that as an Indigenous person, we heard it many times from my elders and other people talking saying that, you know, this is -- like, they love their land, they love their water, you know, and we heard it many times, even 50 years ago, you know, this is our land so we love our land. So I -- I just -- that's why I wanted to ask the Minister if traditional knowledge or if knowledge keepers are consulted, or are they using that to further their studies. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, yes, certainly I think that that's very important as well. We use -- the community-based monitoring involves individuals, local groups, as well as organizations within the communities. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: We know what happened with forest fire 2023 and 2024. So climate change community adaptations, that too -- okay, 2023-2024 was low, and it's stayed consistent all the way. Why -- you know, like, and here we -- the Minister did a statement for ready for wildfires. Why this budget has not changed for the community -- for the community to deal with the climate change and adaptations? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, the adaptation funding is spread out across many activities, primarily being funded through the forest management activity. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you. That's it for this part, for this section. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just looking at the business plan here and similar to what I had mentioned to the Department of Infrastructure as we conclude the budget season in preparation for the summer student employment season, would the Minister provide a summer student plan and appendix to the business plan here in the coming weeks, coming months, so that our students could have something to look forward to within this department? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for the question. Yeah, certainly happy to provide that information to all the Members. I think over the years, the summer student program has been a real integral part of the success of the wildfire program across the NWT. Last year, as an example, we had 40 students hired. So hopefully we have the ability to increase that number a little bit, and happy to report back to the Member. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. No, I'm encouraged by those numbers, and we always look forward to try to do our best. But I'm glad to hear the Minister is on student summer hiring. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Seeing no further questions, please turn to page 88.

Environment and Climate Change, environmental management, monitoring and climate change, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$23,368,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Moving on to policy and strategic planning, beginning on page 92 with information items on page -- are there any questions? Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, and I'm assuming I can -- this is the proper activity to bring this up in. My questions are around some transfer of lands in

the -- specifically for this one in the Inuvialuit settlement region.

I note that in the information items there is obviously the land claim implementation funding of \$5.4 million, and I'm wondering if as part of that, you know, what the department is doing to make it less difficult, I guess, for Indigenous organizations, specifically in the Inuvialuit settlement region, for IRC to access lots in the communities that they can then use to build houses on. From what I understand, there's some difficulties there, and I'm wondering if the Minister can speak to that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the department manages and maintains the inventory of public land so that it is available for application to any party and for any purpose. The department is not able to identify which of these parcels or areas are suitable for housing so within the -- within the communities, it's a little bit difficult to predetermine, but we're certainly working toward trying to prioritize those issues. And I'll pass to the deputy minister to provide a little bit more detail. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, a very important issue, and one that we are prioritizing, we've been having conversations with different communities about their land interests, and communities are starting to identify areas that they would like advanced, in particular areas they'd like to look at in terms of housing. There are a number of requirements, of course, that we are required to undertake. In terms of a transferring land, surveys, you know, having the appropriate bylaws in place, community plans and, you know, any consultation processes. But we prioritized a number of housing applications. We are working with Housing NWT in that regard, and we are trying to move this file forward. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you for that. Yeah, I mean, obviously it's difficult. Land is -- you know, in the smaller communities, and specifically in the coastal communities, you know, there's not a lot of lots there, and as we're aware of, the Indigenous governments, certainly in my region, have received a significant amount of funding to put housing in these communities, as well as the larger

centres of course, but in the smaller communities as well. So it's so important that they get as streamlined as possible working with the department to ensure that they can get -- acquire some of that land that obviously is next to their borders, I guess, the communities that they're trying to develop in.

The deputy minister mentioned some of the surveying. And I know kind of to switch over to bulk land transfer as well, which I know other colleagues here, I'm sure, will speak to, but, you know, given the municipalities and the interest, again, around getting the bulk land transfer done -- and it's not the first time we've discussed that. We're talked about the administrative burden, I guess, and the cost of land surveys which, you know, for smaller hamlets and municipalities would become significant, and I'm wondering what -- you know, is there more -- you know, are we seeing enough concentrated effort, I guess, or concrete efforts to transfer the lands to municipalities so that they can use that land. So kind of what's the department doing to kind of ease that burden on them a little, maybe look at doing, whether that's drone surveys or doing a -- you know, a survey of, you know, all the land at once rather than trying to parcel it out to make it a little less expensive, and is the department willing to work with the municipalities to ensure that they get, again, this important land transfer over so they can use it for economic development, for building homes, for whatever the case may be, but certainly give it to the people that know best what to do with it. So thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for the question. I think a lot of work is being done currently to engage communities to address and have them identify what their priorities are. It's certainly been raised that the surveying challenge is not only a financial challenge, but there's also a capacity challenge within the NWT to do that type of work. So as we've been moving along and working with the different communities in this regard, we have, you know, been having conversations about other potential paths forward that we could work with with the communities, and I think as you look at a lot of the smaller communities have a much larger challenge to move forward in this area than some of the larger ones. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. The Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Yeah, and, you know, even the larger ones. And the challenge, obviously, in the larger ones may not be as much the cost. Again, if we could do this as a -- if you look at doing it as a bulk transfer rather than look at having to take specific portions and survey it out or section it out. I mean, again, you can easily identify what is in the municipal boundaries and can be done. It can be done as one massive survey. And I think if the department would at least commit to looking at that option, and maybe providing some assistance to the municipalities to kind of help them -- help them along to get that done, it would go a long way. I know, you know, my community of Inuvik, certainly I understand there is correspondence coming through to the Minister from the municipality of Inuvik to suggest just that, to say, look, it's time with -- you know, communities have opportunities that may be federal opportunities in there. For example, I use the Inuvik satellite station facility where, you know, that land had to be transferred from the Commissioner's land to the community so then they can therefore enter into a deal with the federal government to put that station there. So, you know, it took a while, and fortunately for us, it still -- it didn't cancel the project, and we still got to do it. But things like that are happening and often happening fairly quickly and, you know, to be able to move on that land as quickly as possible. Obviously if you own it, it's much easier to do that. So I appreciate the department is live to it, and I would hope that they're going to be not just -- you know, I'd like to be proactive and not just kind of yes, I know municipalities have to bring forward the request, but to work closer with the Association of Communities and with the municipalities themselves to get this bulk land transfer. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you to the Member for the comment. I think that that sort of goes back to my previous comment about, you know, us talking and speaking with communities about their needs and sort of what their priorities are. And part of that goes back to the consultation process that we would go through with the local Indigenous governments, the land use component of that land within municipalities still needs to be identified, so that's part of the overall conversation that we've been having as well. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): The Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Yes, and I appreciate that. And I appreciate it's different in every region. I

appreciate some areas have settled land claims, some don't. Allocations have been made and some -- most in some areas, and some areas they haven't. So I know there are other complications but certainly happy to hear that they're working towards it. And, again, for the larger municipalities, to me it seems there should be a much easier process to at least get that portion done and focused then on the smaller ones as well. But no further -- no question there, Madam Chair, no further comments on the section. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I will go to the Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to put a little bit of a spotlight on the item for conservation planning and sustainable livelihood but specifically sustainable livelihoods.

In the department's business plan, there is quite a lot of focus and a lot of measures around how we are managing the success of our community harvesting and trapping, all of these really fantastic programs that are aimed -- and according to the department's business plan -- to address the effects of trauma but, you know, also to help bolster people's connection to the land and getting out on the land.

Can the Minister please explain, then, if there's so many ways to measure the effectiveness of these programs, why the dollar amount for this line item has gone down? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'll pass it to director St. Arnaud. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Director St. Arnaud.

MS. ST. ARNAUD: Thank you, Madam Chair. The decrease is solely because of the conservation planning and the federal agreements that we have for some of those area that have sunset in 2025-2026. They are currently being renegotiated. So, again, you'll see that in the next main estimates. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. And that's good to hear we're not taking money or dollars away from those really crucial programs and the good work that they do. I know they're very

popular in all of our regions, and it's good to see them continue and to be so carefully evaluated for their success. It's a really good success story for the department.

My next question on this section is specifically around legislative initiatives. There is a decrease in budget as well for the policy legislation evaluation and communications line item. So considering the fact that ECC is the GNWT's largest user of the IGC legislative development protocol, how can the Minister explain this? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll pass to director St. Arnaud, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Director St. Arnaud.

MS. JESSICA ST. ARNAUD: Thank you, Madam Chair. That decrease is due to a decrease that we did for travel in the policy unit which won't impact the legislative initiatives. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can we just say generally that, you know, the folks in this division do a lot of great work, as I'm sure the department knows, I know. But it's a lot of heavy lifting. It's a lot of really important work. And I would just suggest that if we are wanting to do expedient and good work on this, on legislative initiatives, it might be worthwhile setting up similar -- something similar to the way that ITI approached the MRA. It's more of a comment than a question but just -- just if the Minister would like to respond. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, Madam Chair, I think we take a very collaborative approach on all of the work that we do. And I take the Member's point on the small reduction. It was part of the overall attempt to make a department-wide approach at some of the fiscal sustainability measures that we were looking at. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Nothing further.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Next, I have the Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think this is the appropriate activity to ask this question on the bilateral nature fund agreement with the federal government.

Given the expiry of this current agreement, if so will it be sufficient to cover the GNWT's commitments; how does the ECC anticipate funding future protected areas? I guess there's kind of like two combined questions there, Madam Chair. Number one, is there going to be more efforts being made to renew the bilateral nature fund agreement? Then if so, are we going to have sufficient funds there to pursue protected areas? Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we just recently signed a new bilateral nature agreement for \$7 million with the federal government a week and a bit ago, and we also have been given approval to carry over the unspent balance from this fiscal year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. And how much is the unspent balance? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we won't have that figure until the fiscal year end. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm encouraged and we, the GNWT, depend on our federal counterparts, as you know, for many sources of funds for various initiatives. Is there other opportunities that the department is pursuing within the business plan for this fiscal year to access further federal funding?

Take climate adaptation for example, we are the victims of climate change, no doubt, and it's been said by the Minister a number of times that our global environment is warming 4 percent faster. So to address that, there should be ongoing discussions with climate change adaptation. I'm just wondering if the department actively involved in federal negotiations for various pots of money. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, Madam Chair, I think this is a very good question. And currently we are signatories to 40 federal funding agreements in a variety of areas across the department. And certainly, it's top of mind from the department to explore every opportunity with the federal government to access any potential funding pots available. And I'd also just like to add that they've done a really good job of, you know, working with the federal government to try and reduce the amount of contribution -- or forms of contribution that the GNWT has to make to these agreements. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to thank this department for taking an aggressive role in accessing maximum opportunities of federal access for funds here, and it's very encouraging to see and hear. Particularly in coming from my area, you know, I can really sincerely relate to the aggression taken by this department. You know, I can come around and say well, I got no water, no road, and it's costly to fly, so I'm glad to see this department pursuing 40 agreements. That's complimentary. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'll pass to director St. Arnaud, and she can give -- provide some detail on some of the agreements. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Director St. Arnaud.

MS. ST. ARNAUD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to show the Member page 78 as part of the business plan, that's where we list all the cost shared agreements with Canada, and you'll note in the 2025-2026 Main Estimates column, some of them look blank but we've actually negotiated those agreements for future years just after the cutoff for the main estimates. So for example, 2 billion trees we've renegotiated. We've renegotiated the bilateral nature agreement. And we've negotiated funding for bison, the surface rights board. So there's a bunch that we've negotiated after the main estimates were prepared as well, so you'll see that in the revised next year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Nothing further, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): I have Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. Fur price program and CHAP and then take your -- take a child trapping, those are all good programs. I know that they are all good programs, and they are being well used by many of the community members and schools because we use those for food, and it's a good learning experience for the young people. They learn. In the whole process, they learn to have respect for their land, for the environment. And so it's good in many ways, you know, like, because there is a lot of respect. We're trying to get our young people -- we can never -- we know that -- because of the Green Peace, our people used to rely on trapping, you know, fall, spring, and it sustain us, and it still is too for clothing now. So in here, there's a fur price program and all these other program, CHAP, and take your child -- or take a child trapping. How is the funding allocated?

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'll pass that to director St. Arnaud.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Director St. Arnaud.

MS. ST. ARNAUD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So there's two pieces here relating to that program. You'll see under grants on page 94, the fur price program, and that money is for trappers who come in and give their fur. We give them an advance. And in some cases, we'll give them bonuses or other payments throughout the year. Then there's the sustainable livelihoods line under contributions, and that's where you're talking about things like CHAP, traditional economy, on the land collaborative, and take a family on the land and take a kid trapping. The budget is split out at \$1.68 million for community harvesters assistance program; 650K for traditional economy, which is harvester mentorship, traditional knowledge, country foods, that all falls under there. The on the land collaborative has \$150,000. Take a family on the land's budget is \$150,000, and take a kid trapping's budget is \$225,000. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you for the information. It's good. The other part too is the conservation planning, and

it's the same. You know, it's -- it's -- that is also important too for -- because we're trying to teach our young people about the conservation as well. So according to the budget here, for the new fiscal year there is a big change within the budget from previous. It went down significantly from 645 to 215. Why; why is there a big change within that budget?

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. If you would indulge me for a moment, I just wanted to go back to the previous question just for a moment.

I just wanted to point out that there's been somewhat of a decline in the fur program over the last little while. So to try and offset that, we've been offering more workshops and courses to try and prop up the industry and give sort of some more incentives to get more folks involved. So for this specific question, the decrease in funding is due to the sunseting of the nature agreement but now that we've signed new bilateral nature agreement, that will return back into the budget in a future iteration. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. And then for the disaster compensations, it's -- you know, it says here that, you know, grants available to hunters and trappers to replace equipment lost as a result of natural disaster.

That -- I know this is for natural disaster, but there's also the one for the forest fire as well. So there are two separate, you know. So I just wanted to ask the Minister if -- I know that, you know -- I got quite a few phone calls because of the wildfire. It's within the next section. But I -- that is also a natural disaster as well, you know, but -- so I know that I got a lot of phone calls because of the infrastructure that was destroyed along Highway No. 3. It's not just that one, but it's also in other regions as well. And in Behchoko as well too, you know, we have -- we lost four infrastructure. We lost four houses in my community. So I want to ask the Minister, with all the applications received for compensations, it would be nice to get a report, the status of the application, if all the people that submitted the application if they were compensated to date. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I think that we'll certainly

be able to provide that information in a high-level kind of generic to, you know, protect the privacy of the applicants. But I don't see why we couldn't provide that information for the Members. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, my time is up for.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay. No further questions, please turn to page 93.

Environment and Climate Change, policy and strategic planning, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$13,294,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Committee, we're going to take a short break for the interpreters. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. We are moving on to regulatory, assessment and authorizations, beginning on page 97 with information items on page 100. Are there any questions? Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just let me get my computer logged in here; still just coming off the break. Okay, thank you, Madam Chair.

I wanted to ask some questions about something that's come up a number of times about bulk land transfers. So I just really want to first ask what is getting in the way of transferring land to the city of Yellowknife? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, this has been an ongoing issue for the bulk land transfer with the city of Yellowknife. We've attempted -- we've had -- I won't say attempted, we've had many conversations with the city and we're currently in the process of looking at a smaller scale approach to the bulk land transfer than was initially envisioned. But I will pass to deputy minister to provide a little bit more detail. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. We've had some really positive discussions

with the city in the last few months, and we're working towards -- really, the city's going to be looking towards identifying some -- its priorities for land transfers and sort of bringing a bit of focus into -- for us to be able to work with them towards moving. And we're looking at establishing -- we've been talking with the city manager about having a memorandum of collaboration between the department and between the city on this issue. So one that's very important and the city is looking at sort of identifying its priorities and that can give us some focus and hopefully we can work together to transfer some land to the city. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I am excited to hear that from the deputy minister. I'm glad to hear that you've been meeting. Glad to hear that you're making some progress and identifying specifics to move forward on. It's certainly a priority for myself, and I think for the Assembly generally, to ensure that land transfers are happening, and it's a priority for the department as indicated in the business plan.

Can the Minister perhaps elaborate a bit, do we have any legislation -- I know that the Land Titles Act is involved here. So is there anything the Minister can tell us about aspects of that Act that might, if changed, would be able to speed up this kind of process? Just noting that it's been taking quite a while from identification of the issue to being able to find a resolution; we're still not there. If the Minister or his staff could discuss it further, I'd appreciate some more information. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, it certainly has been a challenging file from the perspective of -- within the legislation, there are certain requirements which impact more the small communities than the larger communities if you're talking about the need for like development plans, appropriate bylaws within communities that will meet the requirement under the Act to do the transfers. And specifically to the changes to the Act, I would rather have the deputy minister speak to that directly. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. So, you know, we are working with communities on areas that they've identified interest for land transfers and to -- you know, there are a

number of requirements under our legislation and the legislation, you know, including the Land Titles Act and there's the Cities, Towns, and Villages Act, the Community Planning and Development Act and, you know, these things do include things like surveys, bylaws that allow the community to acquire, administer, and control the land, community plans for proper zoning and, of course, we have consultation, section 35 requirements that we have to undertake. And, you know, our focus right now is to work with communities to identify and try to prioritize the areas that they're interested in, in particular for housing. As you can appreciate, and I'm sure everyone can appreciate, the amount of time that it does take to change legislation is substantive and the housing need is now, so we're working to focus on that and the priorities that are in the communities within and to use our resources towards that goal. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. And I do appreciate the department keeping the fire burning on that and setting it as a priority and moving that forward.

I am curious to know -- I mean, my understanding is that some of the issues related to kind of dated legislation were supposed to be addressed by the new Public Lands Act. Why have we not made more progress on implementing that Act? It looks to me like the review substantially happened five years ago, and yet we don't have it in place. Can the department kind of help us understand what's the hold up. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, the department has been working on the PLAR for -- the Public Land Act regulations for a while. And if my recollection is correct, there's been a couple of particular points that have been somewhat challenging through that process, and we continue to work toward a resolution on those specific items. But I will pass to deputy minister Jenkins to provide a little bit more detail. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, we're continuing to do work on the Public Land Act regulations through the IGC technical working group. There's just a number of areas where we're working through issues with the Indigenous governments, interaction between some of the land administration, land use

permitting aspects, and aspects that are carried out by land and water boards. That's one example. So there's a number of issues that we're sort of working through through that collaborative process, and it is work that we hope to advance in the next fiscal year and be able to bring that Act into force. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, okay, so just to be clear what the deputy minister said there is that they are expecting to bring the land -- the regs forward within this fiscal year, so 2025-2026? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, yes, that is our -- our goal is to have it completed in 2025-2026; however, we have multiple partners at the table in this process so we're hoping that we're able to achieve that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Okay, thank you, Madam Chair. I do understand the Minister's need to throw a caveat there that there's more than just the GNWT at the table. But, you know, would just say there's going to be disagreements sometimes when we're moving these things forward but we also have to at some point move things forward. As I noted, you know, five years, that's a long time. And we've had this conversation about a bunch of different Acts and regs, and, you know, there was a Forest Act in the last Assembly. You know, there is a need to move legislation forward regardless of the various kind of disagreements that may occur along the way. You got to sometimes set a date to figure out when you're going to get the agreement that best satisfies everybody's interests knowing that you're not always going to get everything -- not everybody's going to get everything they want but I guess, yeah, I appreciate the department pushing for conclusion of that process within the fiscal year. So thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change, do you want to respond to that?

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member. Point taken.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay. Next, I have Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question within this activity is compensation and benefits from the fiscal year 2023-2024, and it's increased to 11.374. My question to that, compensation and benefits is projected to slightly increase on the RAA overall budget. Are these increases attributed to the new UNW collective agreement, or is there something else such as the consolidation of inspectors and officers into the RAA? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, \$900,000 was directly attributed to the collective bargaining. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Madam Chair (audio).

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay, thank you. No further questions, please turn to page 98.

Environment and Climate Change, regulatory, assessment and authorizations, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$15,131,000. Does the -- sorry, Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: My apologies, Madam Chair, I didn't wave or get your attention enough here but I do have some questions on this section.

My first question is around the land management administration division. First, can the Minister just tell us how many staff work in this division in total.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. 33 in total. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can you also clarify, so they're in charge of the administration of public land. Is that land only outside of municipal boundaries and does it include, like, settlement lands that have been settled within Indigenous land claims? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll pass to deputy minister Jenkins, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. So that includes territorial and Commissioner's land. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, so that could include territorial or Commissioner's land if it is inside municipal boundaries or outside, just to clarify that. Okay, I'm seeing nods. Thank you for that.

I also just wanted to note -- and perhaps I'll make a Member's statement about this later this week or next, but I mean, a big role of this division is participating in and coordinating the GNWT's input into environmental assessments and security proceedings. So can the Minister clarify whether the GNWT is -- or sorry, whether ECC is directly participating in environmental assessments that the GNWT is a proponent of? So, for example, if the GNWT is proposing the Mackenzie Valley Highway or a Slave Geological Province road, does ECC staff then get to participate in that environmental assessment, or what would their role be if the project is led by the GNWT itself? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, yes, we do -- staff does participate in that process, and they provide advice. And I'll pass to deputy minister Jenkins; perhaps he can provide a little more detail beyond advice. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. So those projects such as Mackenzie Valley Highway, Slave Geological Province corridor, are GNWT initiatives. They are led by the Department of Infrastructure. But the GNWT is advancing a whole-of-government approach, so what that means is that departments are working together to inform project activities and participation in the environmental assessment process. And subject-matter experts, not only in ECC but in ECE, in health and in other departments, are providing feedback to infrastructure as the project lead to assist in the environmental assessment process and ultimately to help improve the project. And our subject-matter experts and those of other

departments are available during the proceedings to answer questions and provide additional support as necessary. Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. So thank you for that answer, for the detailed answer. So just to clarify, though, that during proceedings, during the public portion of an environmental assessment when, you know, evidence is being presented, like, those subject-matter experts and maybe they're, you know, water scientists, hydrologists, or maybe they're biologists, do they -- do they get to publicly present the information they have that they think it's important to know about the potential impacts, say, of a road, or are those presentations -- you said that they get to inform infrastructure officials. Is that just happening, like, behind the scenes but not in public? Can you clarify whether there's an opportunity for those subject-matter experts on their own to present what they feel are the important impacts or considerations related to those projects? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll pass to deputy minister Jenkins. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. So it's perhaps important to sort of just take a step back outside of before the work that's done before the public hearing. And so as I mentioned, experts will provide input into project design and feedback, and if there are differences of opinion regarding the analysis or the methodology or the conclusions, we do have a dispute resolution process that we can implement internally.

As people know, I worked formerly in the Department of Infrastructure. That was not implemented to my knowledge. So departments have been agreeing on aspects of what's going forward into the submissions to the board.

Moving forward into the public hearing process, the experts will be available to answer questions. And as you know, it is a quasi judicial process so they -- if they are asked a question do you disagree with this or do you have a different opinion on this, they will -- and are fully in there -- will participate fully in that process and provide those answers. And if it is different

than the project design, of course decisions -- if decisions are made in that instance, then there will be representatives of the project who will have to speak to that in the public process. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. This internal dispute resolution process that you're talking about, I assume it refers to, like, if experts or individuals from different departments have really different views on what should be done about a project. Do you have more details on what that internal dispute resolution process looks like? Is it written down somewhere; is it sort of informal protocol or understanding? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll pass to deputy minister Jenkins.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thanks, Madam Chair. I mean, in essence, it's elevated up through the departmental systems and a conversation had in terms of that and an agreement made. As I mentioned, I'm not aware of any instances where the dispute resolution process was implemented for these projects.

The other piece that I would add is that there has been through the Mackenzie Valley Highway process one of the things that the board is very interested in this, so as we went through the IR process for round one, there was identification of the departments that were involved in the preparation of the responses to all the questions for the IR process. Hope that's helpful. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll leave it there for now, but I do hope to follow up with a Member's statement and questions later on this session. Thanks for your patience and for letting us come back to this one. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): I have next, Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I know that the Ministers -- or our witnesses have already been asked about municipal land transfers, and specifically in my community of Yellowknife, but I'd like to ask what the outstanding issues are with respect to that land

transfer in the city and also ask that the clock be reset. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Sorry about that. Okay. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I think that one of the issues that we have certainly been attempting to look into greatly is that there's a requirement for consultation with the Indigenous governments on land transfer within the municipality, and to approach a bulk land transfer from the perspective of there's not a clear definition of what the intent is for all of the parcels that may be part of that proposed land transfer is one of the certainly challenging aspects of that approach. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So I guess the intention -- I'm somewhat perplexed because I guess the intention of the policy -- what's being called for -- and I think my colleague, the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, yes, was mentioning that, you know, let -- like, you transfer it to the municipality and then they decide what happens to it. And that's my intention -- or that's where my head goes to, because you want to give the municipalities or local authorities the flexibility to develop at their own pace and to make use of opportunities, whether that's selling land and making a profit off it, whether it's developing land for affordable housing, whatever. So the rights issue, of course, that's always going to be something that the Crown has to consider in this country, and I don't take issue with that. I would note, though, that the Yellowknives Dene in particular have been consulted on this in the past and I think have been supported through things like -- through bodies like the NWTAC. I think the Metis have also been -- have also had discussions around this as well with Yellowknife city administration and council. So just to the other point, why do we care as a government what municipalities do with their land in a request like this when what we're trying to do is give them the flexibility to make use of land within municipal boundaries. And that's important. It's not land out in the middle of nowhere; it's lands within their own municipal boundaries. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, so a couple of points. Certainly, one I think is that, you know, there is

a section 35 component to this process that needs to be recognized, and there's a couple of other challenges as well in that under the Act there's requirements for surveys as part of the one of the challenges, and that's part of the conversation that we've been having with the city of Yellowknife and trying to scale back to something that's certainly more manageable from the financial and capacity perspective of surveys. There's also zoning bylaws that come into place. So part of that process of a bulk land transfer would need to ensure that all of the zoning requirements have been met. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Madam Chair. So can the Minister waive those survey requirements within current legislation? And because I can ask more than one question I'll say, and if not, can the Minister recommend a solution to this problem? Because I understand there are technical issues with this transfer but rather than focus on the challenges, I think there's real ways to focus on the opportunities. We know that the survey requirements are one of them and there's a financial cost. We could, for example, develop legislation that would transfer the administration of the lands the way that the GNWT currently administers it over to the city that they could later rezone. So there's solutions to these problems. Is the Minister able to provide any of the solutions here and commit to some of them? Because I'd like to see this process move forward. It's been -- I mean, I was an MLA before when we were discussing this and not much as changed since then. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, thank you, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for the question. A couple of parts to my answer. You know, right now we've had some -- in the last few weeks, a couple of months, I guess, even, we've had some very productive conversations with the city of Yellowknife on a -- as I said earlier, you know, a bit of a scaled back approach, and the survey requirement does not fall under the legislation that I am responsible for. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. Okay, well, I mean, hopefully when we're discussing with our municipal partners, whether it's the city of Yellowknife, the First Nation, or any -- or

Indigenous beneficiary group or whatever, a local authority, that we are involving more than just one Minister and one department. And I know that's the case. It's just I would like -- it would be nice if we saw a clear path forward. And I mean nice is an easy way to put it. I think it's required at this point. Like, the urgency here for housing, for example, has been well stated in this Assembly. The urgency to shore up our economy at a time when we are in very much an existential crisis as a nation means we need to move quickly on this stuff. We can't afford another ten years. And I know the city is the only one taking the government up on this currently, but it would be nice if we, again -- maybe nice isn't the right word.

The right thing to do I think at this point is to really come to terms with this, find a pathway forward, and then do it for everyone, right, rather than just do it on an application basis. Because what we need to do is open up markets in the Northwest Territories for this kind of development. I kind of -- I disagree with the kind of characterization that we've got market and nonmarket-based communities. That's the current regime. But I think they could change if we had the right incentives in place. And the first incentive to building and local development is land. Land access is crucial for the economy, Madam Chair. And we just don't have enough of it in the Northwest Territories. And in this case, this is not an example of a land -- an outstanding land claim holding up development or holding up the opportunities that are inherent to that. This is something -- most of this land that's not already under claim -- because those things aren't even under discussion right now. This is public land owned by the GNWT that's not -- that's held within municipal boundaries. That's the only thing we're talking about here. And it just seems like every time we have this discussion, there are a million reasons why we can't and no one's trying to engage in how we can. So I'll continue to advocate for this, but I think we need to change our mindset and figure out how to knock down those barriers and have that "can do" mindset so we can get this done. We can't wait any longer. We really, really can't because the more the clock ticks, the farther we fall behind. And I don't know if the Minister wants to comment on that.

But the other question I have is the exact same issue which is the North Slave recreational leasing plan that has kind of gone ahead, pulled back. They've carved out piecemeal areas within the North Slave for some people and based on agreements that were never formalized, but they did that anyway, and then there's other people who are still waiting for leases because of various reasons, largely identified with section 35 consultations. But

regardless, if we had a policy framework for recreational land leasing in the North Slave from the GNWT that was clear, provided a pathway to those leases, we could give a lot of certainty to people who are looking for those opportunities. And whether or not there's a claim that slows things down or that denies a lease, at least there's a framework going forward and clear expectations around what those frameworks are. So I guess those are my overarching comments on this. I welcome any feedback. But we can't keep waiting -- we can't keep doing the same thing and expecting we're going to get farther ahead. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. I can certainly agree that, you know, urgency is important here, and I think we've been demonstrating that. Currently, we're prioritizing the applications toward supporting the housing needs across the NWT as one aspect of urgency. And currently our work with the city of Yellowknife is for them to identify their priority areas so that we can work with them to advance those priorities. If we want to sit back and focus solely on changing the legislation, that's a longer process and we're really focused on, but today we need, you know, to support the communities and their opportunities to increase the housing stock across the NWT. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you to the Minister for these last ten seconds. Can I get a commitment -- a timeframe for when at least the Minister will report back to, let's say, the Members -- the Yellowknife Members or the House, or whatever forum he chooses, on when they expect to have concluded the transfer of lands to the city of Yellowknife. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, as I indicated earlier, those conversations with the city are ongoing and happy to answer questions on the floor or provide an update to the Member as progress is made. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay. No further questions, please turn to page 98.

Environment and Climate Change, regulatory, assessment and authorizations, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$15,131,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Moving on to wildlife and forest management, beginning on page 101 with information items on page 105. Are there any questions? Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, can the Minister please tell me -- this is based off their business plan which I believe on their plan is page 36, in the entire document page 76, the business plan update. There is a discussion around monitoring ungulate species. So can the Minister please let me know what ungulate species surveys are slated to occur for the fiscal year 2025-2026. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will pass to the deputy minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the use of the word "ungulate"; however, we will have to return with the listing of the monitoring programs for those animals next year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. I also enjoy a good ten cent word. I -- this question might have to get returned as well, and that's totally fine. But can the Minister provide committee with a list of the most recent surveys by caribou herd by year with estimated populations and ideally with a range map for each herd. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, happy to provide that information. I could give you a few of the key statistics from 2024. So the current statistics -- oh sorry.

The Bathurst last survey was in 2021 at 6,240 animals. Bluenose-East, 2023, at 39,525. Bluenose-West, 2021, at 18,440. Cape Bathurst in 2024 at 97,002. And the Tuk Peninsula in 2024 at 27,098. Certainly range plans, so we have the Wekeezhii. Work is going on to complete a final boreal caribou range plan in this area. The working group met in March of 2024 and had bilateral meetings with the Tlicho government, the southern NWT, and the Sahtu.

So I think maybe to get a more accurate detailed response for the Member, it's on the website, and we're also happy to provide the data and the requested map. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. And yeah, no, that's perfect. I didn't expect the Minister to rattle off all that data right now, but thank you very much. It does paint a little bit of a picture of how often we're getting out and monitoring those herds. I'm just curious specifically because the dollar amount for range planning is fairly static since last year, but in the 2023-2024 actuals they're much higher. Caribou monitoring slightly decreased but not significantly so. So, yeah, more information about what is planned for the coming year is most appreciated.

Madam Chair, I am interested also in specifically the disease monitoring. I want to thank the department for their efforts around wastewater monitoring and all the good work that Taiga does on that -- that item. Obviously that's a different activity. But here in this activity, the department speaks to in their business plan the number of wildlife health monitoring programs, investigations, and outbreak responses. And so my question, Madam Chair, is is the department planning and monitoring for the return of migratory birds with the Avian flu outbreak in the southern part of North America? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, yes, that work does happen in the Northwest Territories. The Avian flu, ECC has -- there were six cases to date in the NWT: Three in 2022, one in 2023, and one in 2024. And we also have a media campaign that was launched in 2022, I believe, which provided information to the general public that sort of coincided with some of the actual bird deaths over time. And there are multiple federal funding sources that support this work and other work in the sector. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. And can the Minister tell me if he's working with health and social services to do more public awareness campaigns, especially if there are more diseased animals, diseased/deceased animals found in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, it's been the practice of ECC to take an all-of-government approach to certainly issues of this magnitude that are high on the radar across the country. So we do work with whichever department is appropriate depending on the circumstance, Madam Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. And can the Minister tell me if there were concerns about diseased animals aside from contacting obviously an ECC officer in your region to report dead birds, is there any foresight or planning around whether or not we will be hearing more public information if, indeed, there becomes a bigger issue around this Avian flu? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you to the Member for raising this. I think it's a great opportunity to put some focus on this event as it's happening across pretty much a good chunk of North America. So certainly part of our approach to this has been putting out public service announcements, you know, warning against touching dead birds that you find for any reason and, you know, ensuring that we're contacting our local wildlife officers to report any of those instances. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll stop beating the dead bird.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Now I have the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to follow up a bad pun like that but try to get back on the subject here.

Madam Chair, I just wanted to understand better; I note that there's some pretty significant fluctuations between year over year in the forest management division. I have to assume that that's related to wildfire response. But just noting that, you know, we went down to \$47 million in 2024-2025 mains, and then actually ended up spending about \$90 million. Can the department first explain the reduction down to \$51 million this year, and is the department confident that this will give them the resources

they need to fight fires that may arise. Fingers crossed that they don't.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, certainly, so there was a small increase in the base funding, if you will, want to call it that. So the approach is to take a base funding approach that covers the -- essentially the day-to-day operations for the season and then take a supplemental appropriation approach to fund if there's significant wildfire activity. So within that budget, it has the capacity to address a small number of actual wildfire events. And if you go beyond that small number, then we're certainly going to be looking for supplemental appropriation. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you. Similarly, I'd just note that there's a variation year over year, a much smaller variation in compensation and benefits. Is it for the same reason? Is this related to staffing up or down as need be in order to address any given year's fire activity, or is there a bit more to that story as well? Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, yes, I think the larger amount in this last fiscal year had to do with the collective bargaining. The small fluctuations that you're seeing year to year can be related directly to fire activity amounts of overtime for full-time permanent staff and those kind of things and how they relate to the suppression activities. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. The next question I had was about I note that there's quite a significant increase in the FireSmart area.

Now, assuming that this is related to delivery of FireSmarting, which it looks like it is according to the notes in the budget here, I'm very supportive of that and happy to see it actually, so maybe the first question I'll ask is whether that can be confirmed that this actually does increase the amount of FireSmarting that's going to be done in the territory, and perhaps if the Minister can provide us some details on where that funding's going to be going. Are there particular communities that are in high need of FireSmarting over others? Are they

kind of spreading this out over the whole territory, or are there kind of specific places where this funding's going to be going? Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for the -- raising this one as well. I think this -- FireSmarting has been a very successful program, and it's delivered all across the NWT in all communities, all forested communities. Some of the key programs that it is running are resilient communities through FireSmart program which received \$7.7 million of multi-year funding through 2027. There's also a prevention and mitigation section that we're working with the department on. There's FireSmart communities. There's fuel mitigation projects. And a lot of this work is coordinated through communities and through the wildfire -- community wildfire protection plan, so it's a very multi-fingered approach, if you will, in how that the programs are delivered to the communities. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. And, yeah, certainly haven't poured through that plan in any kind of detail so it's a bit hard to say. But maybe the Minister can help me understand, is the department doing any kind of tracking on sort of identifying high priority communities based on which ones might be most at risk or which ones FireSmarting is kind of most needed and prioritizing those communities, or are we just kind of spreading money around? Because I'm sure there's some communities whose FireSmarting is ahead of others. Certainly we want to get to a place where all communities in the NWT are equally safe, equally protected. So do we have kind of a way of prioritizing these actions to ensure that the funding's going to the right communities that need it the most? Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you very much for the question. So there's a number of areas of work that is being done in this regard where currently there's been a lot of hazard mapping work that has identified potential risk to communities. The deputy minister met with the NWTAC this morning and had a conversation around the FireSmarting and the community benefitting from these programs. There's \$20 million that was acquired from the federal government in 2022 to support communities, firebreaks, and working in that area. The department goes in

annually in the wintertime and meets with the forested communities and provides support on their community wildfire protection plans. And through that process, the communities would identify areas of risk and areas that they feel need to be supported to protect those communities, and that's totally supported by the department. ECC and our wildfire experts support that work. So there's a lot of really good work going on. And it's very collaborative in that we engage the communities and give them -- they really have ownership of the plan and the need for their communities, and we're there, you know, to help them on the funding side to get -- support them to access the funding from the federal government and to provide the knowledge required to ensure that the right decisions are made. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Those are all my questions for now.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): No further questions. Oh, Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. So the ECC's wildfire afteraction review identified a number of areas of improvement, and one of those was the recommendation that ECC streamline and centralize the budgeting process, human resources, and reporting for wildfire management into a single program with clear reporting structures to ensure more effective resource allocation and cost controls.

Can the department or can the Minister provide a status update on the GNWT's response to this recommendation and any budget that's being allocated or human resource changes that would contribute to fulfilling what's being recommended here. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for the question. So this work is in its very early stages. After the recommendations were received, the department did go back and look at this area and as a result of those internal conversations, we've engaged MNP as a contractor to go away, take -- and provide us with some options on how to best move forward in this direction as it was recommended in the afteraction review. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay. Thanks to the Minister for that update. There's another recommendation around increasing ECC's internal capacity for staff who have competency with wildfire modeling. So I'm wondering whether there's anything in the budget here related to systems purchases or improvements to forecast and model wildlife behaviour or training for staff, for that matter. Can the Minister clarify whether that's on the agenda for this year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, yes, we have -- there has been some -- part of our normal annual operations certainly is training with our staff, and that's always an ongoing evolving exercise. So when it comes to the expertise of the wildfire -- oh, I lost the word now -- behaviour modeling folks, there's always that ongoing training, ongoing training. Unfortunately, right now, we don't have the additional funding required within this budget to advance other components of the recommendations, so we will be coming back with a supplemental appropriation request in the future to address those shortfalls within our budget. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for letting us know. I do certainly think that, you know, we need to urgently, you know, follow those recommendations and do what is necessary to protect us from every upcoming wildfire season and not wait. So I do look forward to seeing those supplementary budget requests and hope that the department can work on this as soon as possible. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. And, Madam Chair, certainly implementing, you know, the 25 recommendations is certainly top of mind for me as the Minister, and the department has really taken a proactive approach in prioritizing the recommendations that can be accomplished rather rapidly. It's quite an undertaking overall so, you know, I think they've done a good job of implementing everything that could be very quickly implemented and have taken a very proactive approach to implementing the remaining recommendations. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay. No further questions, please turn to page 102.

Environment and Climate Change, wildlife and forest management, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$67,491,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. There are additional information items on page 106 to 114. Are there any questions? Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. I had a question about the environment fund. So that's on page 106.

So the accumulated surplus for this fund seems to consistently be quite large. So, you know, from \$9.5 million the year before last. Last year \$8.7 million. Now we're back up to a \$9.4 million surplus. Can the Minister explain why we need such a large surplus, especially for a fund that, you know, it's bringing in about \$7 million each year but why are we sitting on a \$9.5 million surplus? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, yes, we are expecting some increases in the expenses here, and there are some additional programs that are going to be rolled out. But I'll pass to director St. Arnaud to give a little bit more detail. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Director St. Arnaud.

MS. ST. ARNAUD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So, yes, the expenses are projected to increase as more bottles get returned to the depot. We're actually rolling out three new programs, and the accumulated surplus is being used, if you look at the 2024-2025 Main Estimates and the projected 2025-2026. So we expect the surplus to go down into future years. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the Minister or his staff give any more details as to what are these big programs that are about to roll out that we should be looking for? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Deputy minister Jenkins will provide some detail. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Jenkins.

MR. JENKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. So looking at over the next three years, about a million and a half, up to 2027-2028, to implement the waste resource management strategy. So different actions under that: Expansion of existing programs and the creation of several new waste reduction and diversion programs; piloting an expansion of the electronics recycling program; promoting existing programs of course; looking at options to reduce and divert construction renovation and demolition waste; working with the housing corporation and Department of Infrastructure.

We're also looking at doing -- making improvements to and investing in our depots and our processes centres. There's a number -- we've got lots of aging equipment there - bailers, forklifts, computers, quality assurance, accounting equipment. Looking at increasing the funding to help counter rising operator costs due to inflation, and some new infrastructure and equipment to continue the expansion of our drop-and-go program, looking at a number of outreach programs on our recycle programs as well. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay. Thank you to the Minister and staff for those -- that description. That is actually really useful to know, and we can follow up to get more detail about those new waste reduction and recovery programs which I think are exciting. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): No further questions. Thank you, Members.

Please turn now to the department summary found on page 75 with information items on page 76 to 82. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions, committee, I will now call the departmental summary.

Environment and Climate Change, operations expenditure, total department, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$133,814,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing before us. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses from the chamber.

What is the wish of the committee? Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I move the chair rise and report progress.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): The motion is in order. The motion is non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion's carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress.

---SHORT RECESS

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. SPEAKER: Member from the Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 275-20(1) And, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from THE Deh Cho. Can I have a seconder. Let's pick the guy from Hay River North. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Close vote. Motion carried.

Reports of Committee of the Whole. Third reading of bills. Mr. Clerk.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Wednesday, March 5th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
 - Oral Question 530-20(1), Senior Envoy to Government of Canada
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Acknowledgements
7. Oral Questions
8. Written Questions
9. Returns to Written Questions
10. Replies to the Commissioner's Address

11. Petitions
12. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
14. Tabling of Documents
15. Notices of Motions
16. Motions
17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
18. First Reading of Bills
19. Second Reading of Bills
20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates
21. Report of Committee of the Whole
22. Third Reading of Bills
23. Orders of the Day

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Wednesday, March 5th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 5:57 p.m.

Unedited Hansard