



STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

Hansard Verbatim Report

No. 22 — April 3, 2023

**Published under the
authority of
The Hon. Randy Weekes
Speaker**



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

Twenty-Ninth Legislature

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the
Legislative Assembly are available
within hours after each sitting.

<https://www.legassembly.sk.ca/Calendar>

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

Ms. Colleen Young, Chair
Lloydminster

Ms. Jennifer Bowes, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon University

Mr. Ryan Domotor
Cut Knife-Turtleford

Mr. Ken Francis
Kindersley

Mr. Delbert Kirsch
Batoche

Ms. Alana Ross
Prince Albert Northcote

Mr. Doug Steele
Cypress Hills

[The committee met at 15:30.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Standing Committee on the Economy. I am Colleen Young and I'll be chairing the meeting this afternoon. And we have committee members here: Ryan Domotor; Todd Goudy in for a while for Ken Francis; Delbert Kirsch; Alana Ross; Doug Steele; and Erika Ritchie in for Jennifer Bowes.

Pursuant to rule 148(1), the following estimates were committed to the Standing Committee on the Economy on March 30th, 2023: 2023-24 estimates vote 1, Agriculture; vote 23, Energy and Resources; vote 26, Environment; vote 16, Highways; vote 89, Immigration and Career Training; vote 84, Innovation Saskatchewan; vote 35, Saskatchewan Research Council; vote 90, Trade and Export Development; vote 87, Water Security Agency.

Today the committee will be considering the estimates for the Water Security Agency and Innovation Saskatchewan. We will take about a 15-minute break between the two different ministries around 5:30 to change out officials.

**General Revenue Fund
Water Security Agency
Vote 87**

Subvote (WS01)

The Chair: — We will now begin with vote 87, the Water Security Agency, central management and services, subvote (WS01). Minister Cockrill is here with his officials. I would ask that the officials please state their names before speaking at the microphone, and you don't have to touch them. Presumably they will note when you're ready to speak; the Hansard operator will then turn on the mike for you. So, Minister, you can introduce your officials and begin with your opening remarks.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you members of the committee. I am Jeremy Cockrill, Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Water Security Agency, and I'm pleased today to provide details of Water Security Agency's planned work for the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

I'm joined this afternoon by the following officials: to my right, Shawn Jacques, interim president and CEO [chief executive officer] of the Water Security Agency; to my left, David Cooper, vice-president of agriculture services and economic development. I also have John Fahlman, vice-president of infrastructure; Mark Kleefeld, vice-president of finance; Thon Phommavong, vice-president of science and licensing; Ali'i Lafontaine, general counsel, legal services; Leah Clark, executive director of agriculture water management; and from my office, Lee Guse, my chief of staff.

In Saskatchewan, Water Security Agency manages the majority of government's core water responsibilities, providing a one-window approach for Saskatchewan citizens. We have a renewed vision to be the best water management agency in North America, providing safe, reliable water that drives economic growth in Saskatchewan.

Water Security Agency plays a central role in supporting Saskatchewan's Growth Plan for the next decade of growth through its mandate to responsibly and sustainably manage our province's water resources to expand economic growth, improve quality of life, and enhance environmental well-being. The expansion of Water Security Agency's mandate is consistent with the expansion of growth in the province as water is an economic driver. We believe it is time to reframe how water is managed in Saskatchewan to ensure the growth targets are achieved while regulating this essential resource in our province.

Public safety is critical to the Water Security Agency's operations. Protecting the public's municipal drinking and wastewater systems are core responsibilities that will not be compromised.

WSA [Water Security Agency] must also protect the sustainability of our water resources, safeguard against floods and droughts, and help to preserve our natural habitats. Water has long been a pivotal resource in Saskatchewan and Water Security Agency manages it sustainably while promoting water as an economic driver. Water Security Agency supports Saskatchewan's ability to adapt, innovate, and thrive through resilience and protection of vital water systems.

Now last year Water Security Agency launched its new strategic plan. This plan updated many of the core functions that WSA carries out every single day. But it also brought a renewed focus on not only what we do as the province's manager of water resources, but also how we can better serve the people of this province.

In 2022 WSA took a serious look at how it could best deliver on its goals and objectives under the new strategic plan. We reallocated resources and found cost savings to better deliver on our core lines of business, including expanded economic and agricultural development and the creation of a new client services model within our organization. The client services model will focus on providing service excellence to our clients. And I'm grateful to the hard-working staff at WSA around the province for their commitment to protecting our water resources for the people of Saskatchewan.

Now a notable example of water driving economic activity is our investment in irrigation in the province. We have a growth plan goal of 85,000 irrigable acres being added in the province before 2030, and we're well along the path to meet that goal. Now in this year's budget, there's \$32 million included to support irrigation development, contributing to the economic and food security goals of Saskatchewan's Growth Plan: \$30 million for the Lake Diefenbaker irrigation expansion project, and \$2 million for smaller irrigation projects progressing around the province.

We believe that Saskatchewan and Canada have the potential to benefit from this added reassurance of food security in a time of international instability. Responsibly using our water resources through sustainable allocations will increase the province's resiliency to drought conditions.

Now Water Security Agency will also continue to support agricultural growth and sustainability through the continuing

evolution of the agricultural water management program. And we realize that more work is needed to ensure both our policies and processes are both effective and efficient.

In 2022 we launched a comprehensive engagement strategy to listen to our clients, to prepare a new made-in-Saskatchewan agricultural water management stewardship policy. The engagement sessions with over 70 invited participants are continuing this spring, and we are on track to have the policy finalized by the end of this calendar year, 2023.

WSA continues to focus on the network approach to drainage. Large network approvals, they do take time to develop, but they're ultimately more successful as water issues rarely just exist on one farm or property. Partners such as the Saskatchewan Conservation and Development Association and the Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds and the members of these organizations are facilitating the qualified persons program on the ground.

Water Security Agency has collaboratively developed workshops with partners to introduce farmers to innovative agricultural water management and drainage solutions. These workshops are offered free of charge to our clients around the province.

Now Water Security Agency has several initiatives directly aimed at helping our communities with local improvements in response to weather-related events. There's \$500,000 for flood damage reduction programming. This includes both reactive and pre-emptive measures to mitigate damage in municipalities due to flooding.

Just under \$2 million in new funding will go towards expediting the flood hazard identification and mapping program to help mitigate community flood risk, which will result in cost savings to citizens, local businesses, and the provincial government. Flood plain mapping is vital in community planning for extreme weather events. And under Saskatchewan's climate resilience measurement framework, the goal is for all at-risk communities to have necessary flood mapping in place by the year 2030.

Now the Water Security Agency is working internally to build a modern and enduring provincial flood mapping program and through a partnership with Natural Resources Canada is emerging as a national leader in advancing provincial flood mapping. Through cost sharing with the federal government, WSA is finalizing flood maps for 22 priority communities over the next three years. And with the application of the statements of provincial interest, these maps are among some of the most rigorous in Canada.

WSA continues to support municipalities to establish or update drought and other water-related emergency response plans. And with the dry conditions that we saw in this province in 2020 and 2021, it was certainly stressful on many communities' water supplies. And with a more variable climate, it is expected that their water supplies may be threatened more frequently in the future. And this is exactly why drought response planning and water supply infrastructure will be extremely important going into the future.

Now Water Security Agency also operates the provincial system

of 72 dams and 240 kilometres of conveyance channels. This infrastructure requires ongoing maintenance and capital upgrades. Most of these pieces of infrastructure are many decades old built in the formative years of our great province.

In the WSA capital budget, \$40 million is earmarked for water infrastructure rehabilitation including work on dams and other water control structures that help secure the province's water supply. This includes a improved water supply system at Pike Lake, substation replacement at the East Side pump station at Lake Diefenbaker, control structure upgrades at Buffalo Pound, and structure improvements at the Candle Lake dam. WSA prioritizes work on these structures based on an annual assessment of the dam infrastructure normalized risk index.

In addition to the dams, canals, and other water infrastructure we own and operate for the province of Saskatchewan, there are numerous bridges, culverts, and other infrastructure that cross WSA-owned sites that are owned by third parties, usually local municipalities in the area. As such, we will be launching a pilot program and investing half a million dollars to work with owners of infrastructure that either cross WSA-owned canals or that cross channels downstream of WSA assets. This program will provide cost-sharing resources to ensure they meet the needs of their owners and are safe to operate going forward.

The intent of this pilot program is to evaluate the potential for a more permanent program into the future. This pilot program will also help establish a consistent approach for working with assets owned by third parties that could have an impact on Water Security Agency-owned water control structure and operations.

And lastly, as mentioned, Water Security Agency is committed to working with communities in Saskatchewan to ensure the safety and reliability of Saskatchewan's water supply. WSA provides a strong focus on educating and sharing information with clients about water management requirements, benefits, and their duties and rights. The newly formed compliance promotion branch supports communities to bring their water and sewage works into compliance with relevant policy and regulations. We continue to support and work with communities that face challenges in upgrading their drinking water and wastewater infrastructure.

All levels of government, system owners, and the consumers deserve credit for their time and investment in the critical water and wastewater infrastructure throughout our province. And since 2007, over \$1.7 billion has been invested or is being planned for drinking water systems and \$1.4 billion on wastewater systems around Saskatchewan. Now these numbers do not include ongoing operation and maintenance expenditures that are covered by municipalities and private owners of water and sewage works.

Monitoring flow forecasts and surface and groundwater quality and quantity is a core function of the agency as well. Our annual spring runoff outlook report is a valuable tool used by citizens, producers, and communities to prepare for the year ahead.

Now, Madam Chair, I know that this year's investments will see Water Security Agency continue to play a vital role in driving economic growth in our province. And that economic growth will benefit all Saskatchewan people both today and into the future

for generations to come.

Madam Chair, this concludes my introductory overview of Water Security Agency's budget request for 2023-2024. I certainly welcome any comments or questions and look forward to our discussion here today.

The Chair: — All right. Thank you, Minister. I will now open the floor to questions from committee members, and I'll recognize Ms. Ritchie.

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm maybe going to start by referencing the 2023-24 business plan, which on page 7 provides a financial summary for the upcoming year, where it lists the grants from the government revenue fund as stated in vote 87, along with own-source revenue, and then a breakdown of the expense budget, and focus my questions perhaps on those items.

[15:45]

So you've mentioned, for starters, that we have science and licensing receiving over \$15 million. And I would like to know if the compliance and enforcement parts of the operational activities is part of that budget, and if so what portion and a further breakdown on that line item?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you, Madam Chair, and for the question, Ms. Ritchie. The science and licensing division, as you point out, for this next upcoming fiscal year is just over \$15 million. There is our clients promotion branch underneath that division in the Water Security Agency.

It's not the only area in the organization that we do compliance through. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to ask Mark Kleefeld to speak more specifically on the science and licensing budget and how compliance fits into that.

Mr. Kleefeld: — Sure, thank you. Mark Kleefeld, vice-president of finance. So within the science and licensing budget this year, we have \$2.9 million for compliance promotion. And so these are the folks who will work with the agencies that we regulate and generally really work to educate them and bring them into compliance.

The budget here is an increase, so it's \$200,000 greater than our Q3 [third quarter] forecast for this year. And it's a half million dollars larger than what we spent in '21-22.

Ms. Ritchie: — And so when you talk about the . . . You mentioned the client service branch is part of this line item, is that right? Or what were you referring to?

Mr. Kleefeld: — Oh no, sorry. No, client services is not part of this. This is compliance promotion. So these are the folks who work with municipal waterworks to ensure that they are in compliance or work with them to get them into compliance. Yeah, these are the compliance people in science and licensing.

Ms. Ritchie: — And you said 2.9 million for that department?

Mr. Kleefeld: — That's correct, yes. We would call it a branch within the division. Yes.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. And then what about the rest of the 15 million?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — So as I said, Ms. Ritchie, in my answer to the last question, this isn't the only area that we have compliance in the agency. And in the science and licensing division, there's a whole wide range of activities that we do. There's about 100-some staff that we have in the science and licensing branch and this, you know, includes meeting regulatory requirements that we have, even ranging over to hydrological analysis.

And I'll ask Thon Phommavong just to provide a little bit more colour on what is included in that \$15 million in this fiscal year.

Mr. Phommavong: — Thank you, Minister. Thon Phommavong, vice-president of science and licensing division. In this division really we are focusing, like the minister indicated, we are focusing on helping our clients come into compliance, you know, rather than hit them with a big hammer right off the bat. So we want to focus on education and share the knowledge and share the information.

So within this group we actually have a branch that is called science and knowledge, where they are focusing on gathering the knowledge and then share that knowledge with the public as well as our clients. These are scientists, engineers, as the minister mentioned, hydrologists, and scientists, water quality scientists, groundwater scientists, as well as other environmental engineers.

And then we have another branch that is looking after approvals where we want to make sure that the construction of waterworks or sewage works, for example, comply and meet the standards, not only to make sure that the waterworks meet public health standards but also protect the investment that the minister mentioned that we invested quite a bit of money since 2007.

And then finally the other piece is the compliance promotion, which the minister has already indicated with the budget of around \$2.9 million.

Ms. Ritchie: — You mentioned a number of, sort of, science priorities — hydrology, water quality, groundwater, etc. And so I'm wondering what the output is of that work. Is it providing annual reporting on state of water quality and quantity and . . . Yeah, maybe I'll just start there.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Yeah, I would say what the work that the science and licensing division does is . . . You know, I think Thon mentioned it in his previous answer, but there's a mixture of both internal and external uses. I mean, externally, obviously this would be the division that produces, you know, the spring runoff report, for example, that is widely used by producers, by communities, to help understand what the runoff conditions look like in different areas of the province. In terms of an annual drinking water report, the science and licensing division also looks after that report.

But then, as Thon also said, there's also work that the science and licensing division does to support internal work, whether that's ongoing maintenance, whether that's capital work that we're doing on different control structures or conveyance channels. So I would just say, Ms. Ritchie, it's a bit of both in terms of, you

know, who's using the information at the end of the day, whether it's internal or external users.

And perhaps, Thon, you want to add a little to that.

Mr. Phommavong: — Thank you, Minister. Yeah, we also make the data available to the public online, SaskH2O, for example. All of our water quality information is available publicly online and can be downloaded any time. And we are working to add on to the information that is more GIS [geographic information system]-based, so that it makes it easier for the public to interpret the results. So the goal is to make the information easier for the public.

Ms. Ritchie: — Yeah, in terms of water quality data that is collected, can you provide a bit of a breakdown in terms of, you know, the schedule and the frequency and the approach to collection of that data by the branch?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Yeah, in terms of frequency of data collection, I mean it really varies. Again we have a variety of stakeholders that we work with at the Water Security Agency, whether that's private entities or municipalities. So it will vary quite a bit in terms of frequency of data collection.

Take surface water, for example. Surface water is obviously a more seasonal schedule in terms of data collection, whether that's on lakes for recreational users or different resort communities around the province. So there's that more, kind of, infrequent or seasonal approach to collecting data. And then on the other side, you know, there's obviously municipalities that we're working with on a regular basis. And different municipalities, you know, the schedule may vary in terms of how frequently data is collected.

And you know, again, we work with all of these municipalities. That's part of our compliance promotion branch here. So it also depends largely on, you know, the type of system that a community may have and also the population that is in that municipality. And I think Thon is probably better equipped to speak to some specifics around data collection around the province.

Mr. Phommavong: — Thanks, Minister. Regarding surface water, we do have, on an ongoing basis and annually as well, 24 primary stations. And these are stations located in Sask River, for example, where we monitor all kinds of parameters. We monitor flows as well, and that is reported to a national database as well as to our federal and provincial counterparts as part of our national, international agreement, provincial agreement, such as Prairie Provinces Water Board for example.

[16:00]

And then in terms of the drinking water, it also depends on whether you provide it by ground or surface water. The monitoring requirement will be different. City of Regina, for example, the water from Buffalo Pound by way of Lake Diefenbaker, that's surface water and they have a surface water treatment plant. And the monitoring would be more frequent compared to groundwater because the water, typically from the surface, is deemed to be a higher risk. So for example we collect bacteriological quality samples and also parameters such as, we

call it health and toxicity parameters, to make sure that the water is safe for people to drink. So in general there are two types of, I would call it data. And so the drinking water one is monitored for acute; the other one is for chronic.

Ms. Ritchie: — You mentioned the 24 primary stations where you're monitoring for flow. So is that both water quality and flow rates?

Mr. Phommavong: — Yes, quantity and quality.

Ms. Ritchie: — And what sort of water bodies are we talking about?

Mr. Phommavong: — Major water bodies, for example South Sask River.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. And I think you mentioned that you have other partners and agreements in place for undertaking those measurements. So who would those partners be?

Mr. Phommavong: — Well for example Prairie Provinces Water Board. So that would be Manitoba, Alberta.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. And what other ones?

Mr. Phommavong: — Well the other one would be . . . [inaudible] . . . perspective, Mackenzie River board, for example.

Ms. Ritchie: — Yes, and what else?

Mr. Phommavong: — The other one in the southwest area, the Frenchman River, I think.

Ms. Ritchie: — Is the federal government or Environment Canada also part of those agreements?

Mr. Phommavong: — Yes, in some cases. Yeah, that would be correct.

Ms. Ritchie: — What would be those cases?

Mr. Phommavong: — So, for example with Environment Canada we have an agreement with them to monitor hydrometric stations, for example. John, do you know the number that we monitor for Environment Canada?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — So in terms of where we do monitoring in partnership with the federal government, in terms of hydrometric stations around the province, we have 150 WSA hydrometric stations; the federal government has 170 hydrometric stations. Again we do ongoing data collection at all those stations and work with the federal government as a partner on those.

The data that we collect there is publicly available on the Water Security Agency website for all 320 stations. On the federal website, my understanding is that it's just data information available for the 170 federally owned hydrometric stations.

And again I mean, this work that's being done here, it's certainly important when it comes to our water resources in Saskatchewan. And again this data is collected in co-operation with the Prairie

Provinces Water Board because we need to make sure we know what's coming into the province from Alberta and then what's going out the other side towards Manitoba and partners going south.

Ms. Ritchie: — Right. Right. And so these stations you're referring to, are they monitoring both quality and quantity? What is the purpose of the collection?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Yeah, the hydrometric stations are purely just for the flow, the quantity of water.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay, yeah, because my questions were centred around water quality not quantity. And are there other agreements in place for monitoring water quality with the federal government?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Yeah. So, Ms. Ritchie, in my previous answer I talked about the hydrometric stations focused on the flow, focused on the quantity. I understand you're moving in a line of questioning that has to do with the quality of the water.

You know, the 24 stations that monitor water quality that Thon referenced in a previous answer, those are Water Security Agency owned and operated. You know, the federal government does not have responsibility or jurisdiction there to monitor water quality at those stations. And again, that's certainly our approach, that we are the regulator of water quality in the province. So we don't have an agreement with the federal government at any of those 24 stations.

Ms. Ritchie: — So you know, there were some very unexpected and sort of surprising events that occurred during the summertime with respect to water quality and sample collection. I mean I was expecting to hear something more in the lines of, you know, within this line item of the budget of science and licensing, how the province either collaborates or co-operates with the federal government on matters of mutual interest. Because I assume that there has been ongoing dialogues, and you know, programs and objectives around water quality.

And so I'm wondering if you can tell me, just kind of walk me through what happened during the summertime with the incidents of, you know, the order in council that came about in a very irregular manner in the summer.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Yeah. No, and you used the words "surprise," "unexpected." And I can tell you that, you know, from a provincial perspective, from a producer perspective, what we saw in the summer was also surprising and unexpected from our perspective. As I said previously, Saskatchewan Water Security Agency is the sole agency responsible for regulating water quality in Saskatchewan. We've done it for a number of years. We have significant expertise within our agency around the province, in all of our offices.

So in terms of, you know, what occurred over the summer, I mean we have an example of where, within the province, we have established processes for monitoring water quality as we've spoken to already. And when we have producers reaching out to us and contacting us about suspicious vehicles coming onto their land and people that did not ask permission to come onto the land to test private water sources. Again what we saw was these

individuals testing private dugouts, waterways that are not flowing into rivers or lakes.

And so you know, what we saw there was really an example, we believe, of federal overreach. And you know, *The Trespass to Property Act* has been amended in recent years; however even after those amendments, federal employees were still exempt as agents of the Crown.

So certainly I mean, you know, provincially I would say that we understand that if we're going to be accessing a client's land or be accessing a private water body on a client's land, it's incumbent on us — even though, you know, we are the provincial government — it's incumbent on us to contact that landowner and receive permission to go on that land.

Again we have a desire to work collaboratively with landowners and producers around the province, and I think that's an expectation that should be expected of federal employees as well. Even though what they may or may not be doing on those private water bodies may be legitimate, it's still an expectation that they should contact a landowner. And so that's really what motivated, I would say, what transpired over the summer.

Ms. Ritchie: — Do these activities deviate from past practice?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — You know, in terms of deviating from past practice, I would say that the practices within Water Security Agency have not changed in the sense that, you know, provincially again we're going to continue and have continued to seek permission from landowners. In terms of the federal government and their employees perhaps deviating from past practice, I mean it's hard to say if at one time they were obtaining permission from landowners, but clearly in these instances this summer they were not. And that's why we get a phone call.

And so certainly, you know, I understand that there was certainly a lot of sensitivity out there to what transpired this summer. But you know, in terms of the federal government deviating, I suppose if they were obtaining permission, then they may have stopped obtaining permission from specific landowners.

And you know, I know Shawn has had some conversations with ECCC [Environment and Climate Change Canada] since the summer and had some conversations about what transpired and how to perhaps work collaboratively more in the future. And I'll ask Shawn to provide a little bit more detail on that.

[16:15]

Mr. Jacques: — Yeah. Shawn Jacques, interim president and CEO of WSA. Yeah, after kind of the events that transpired, I had some conversations with ECCC and you know, they had acknowledged that this summer they weren't seeking permission. They maybe didn't understand some of the sensitivity from producers about potentially transferring, you know, crop diseases on their land. They were interested in learning about that.

Plus they were also wanting to learn more about . . . They didn't really know what WSA did. And so some of my conversations with the officials talked about, you know, the role of our agency and making sure that we're not duplicating services.

Ms. Ritchie: — It was my understanding that the water collection was focused on nutrient levels. Was that your understanding as well?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — One of the landowners that did contact us when they spoke to the individuals that were on their land, there was some part of the conversation, I understand, that was about nutrient levels in the water. So certainly, I think that's, again, when we talk about how the events of this summer impact producers around the province and certainly our economy in the province, what we saw from the federal government in the last year in terms of talking about a hard cap on fertilizer emissions.

When we start talking about nutrient levels, and again, I think it's fair to say we talk in this House regularly about the 4Rs [right source at right rate, right time, right place] of fertilizer in our ag sector. And certainly our producers are some of the most responsible users of inputs, I would say, in the world. When we have conversation around monitoring nutrient levels, you know, and doing so in a way that really wasn't asked for or notice wasn't provided to landowners, certainly I would say most producers in this province, and certainly us as Water Security Agency and as a provincial government, we certainly saw a problem with that potentially.

Ms. Ritchie: — And did it ever occur or did you ever attempt to reach out to your federal counterpart to discuss the concern prior to taking action?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — I guess I would start the answer, Ms. Ritchie, by reminding everyone that again we had people entering private land, private water sources, without notice, and you know, without the federal government even notifying the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency about the work they were attempting to do in our province.

When the situation occurred and we were contacted about the concerns of a number of landowners around the province, we certainly felt the most important thing was to notify the producer community in the wider province to be mindful and be watchful for this type of activity occurring on their land. And you know, when I think about what's important, we certainly felt it was important to alert producers around the province in all different areas and to ensure that they were being watchful for this type of activity occurring on their property as well.

Ms. Ritchie: — And what was the perceived threat?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Well I can give you a long answer. I can give you a short answer. I'll give you somewhere in between. I think, you know, the perceived threat is a laundry list of federal regulation that have been put on this province that negatively impact people, communities, and producers all over our province. And the perceived threat therefore is the federal government collecting data without consent and using that data to inform federal mandates or federal policy that negatively impacts the people of our province.

So when we talk about perceived threat, when we believe — when this government and Water Security Agency believes — that our province may be under threat by our federal government advancing policy that we view as threatening to the people of this province, absolutely there's a threat there. And that's why we felt

it was important to take action, notify the producer community, and to ensure that this type of activity ceased immediately.

Ms. Ritchie: — Do you think our recreational water bodies are under any threat?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Threat from federal government testing or what? Can you be more specific on that?

Ms. Ritchie: — No. My question is . . . I assume as the agency responsible for all matters related to water, that you will have undertaken risk assessments to evaluate the level of threat to the quality of our recreational bodies, water bodies that are important to the people of this province and contribute to economic development, tourism. Outfitters rely on high-quality water bodies. And so I'm asking you about the level of threat that recreational water bodies currently are under.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Well I would say in general terms, you know, there's risk posed to every body of water in the province whether it's a private dugout, whether it's the North Saskatchewan River, the South Saskatchewan River, any sort of lake. There's risk any time that we're talking about water.

Of course Water Security Agency, we undertake activities to manage risk and to work with municipalities, resort communities, you know, to understand if there is a risk and then how to quantify that risk, and then how to go forward with policy that makes sense.

Ms. Ritchie: — So with regards to recreational water bodies in Saskatchewan and understanding a risk-informed framework, how are you evaluating and responding to those risks?

Mr. Phommavong: — Thanks for the question. In terms of evaluation, the scientific method . . . [inaudible] . . . are involved, obviously starting with collecting proper samples and following a scientific protocol. And as I indicated, we do have a science and knowledge branch whose job is to basically focus and do work on this area. So we would collect the samples, and then the water quality sample would be assessed and compared to the national standards established to protect recreational lake water quality.

For example, we would monitor the level of bacteria by the swimming area. And we actually work with our partner, in this case the Ministry of Health or the health region, if the bacteria sample in the water — for whatever reason, naturally occurring for most cases, and I would say almost all of it — if it's too high at that particular time. An advisory would be issued so that the people would not be swimming in that water. That's one example on recreational activities that I can share with you.

Mr. Jacques: — If I could just add, you know, we do that kind of monitoring, but then we also do a proactive monitoring as well. We have a team of scientists that go out to different lakes, rivers, and do water quality checks, you know, through the winter, through the summer. I've attended with some of our staff on some of their surveys and collecting of samples.

And one story I think of is, one of our scientists was doing work on the North Sask River, and I can't remember all the scientific terms, but what he had explained to me is that that river system

is healthy because the types of organisms he was finding in the samples wouldn't be there. They're a very sensitive type of organism; they wouldn't exist if the river systems were healthy. So it's some of the proactive work that we're doing to monitor as well.

Ms. Ritchie: — There are several water quality experts on record who have indicated or voiced their concerns for the diminishing water quality in our lakes and rivers and that the threat has increased, the water quality has diminished. And when I meet with stakeholders, they lament to me the fact that it's having an impact on their enjoyment of those water bodies and that it is indeed affecting tourism and other uses of the water bodies. So you know, I appreciate the response in terms of how you go about conducting the testing and assessing the risk, but I can't see how the trends that are existing are satisfactory.

I want to ask about, you mentioned the 4Rs program, and I understand that there's a target that's been set for 25 per cent of Saskatchewan cropland under the 4R program by 2025. Are you going to be able to meet that target?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — We talked about the 4Rs and fertilizer use. And in terms of that target, I think that's really a question for the Ministry of Agriculture as that doesn't fall within Water Security Agency.

Ms. Ritchie: — Oh. So maybe you could clarify me why you were referencing it in your remarks.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — The 4Rs are, you know, a strategy used by producers. It's not a government program. It's a strategy used by producers to use fertilizer, so it's not mandated by the provincial government necessarily. It's what producers use. I mean, Shawn himself is a producer in our province and probably even better equipped than myself to speak to how to manage fertilizer use and optimize that. But in terms of hitting a target around fertilizer use, that would really fall more into the Ministry of Agriculture.

[16:30]

Ms. Ritchie: — I would respectfully disagree with you on that point. You know, it seems to me that, you know, when I have attended watershed conferences and other venues or forums where, you know, topics and issues around water quality and quantity are discussed, that program is pointed to as a solve for these issues of addressing nutrient loading and its impact on the water quality of water bodies that your ministry is responsible for.

You know, all these things are definitely connected. And if you are relying upon those sorts of programs, regardless of where they're, you know, administered from, to achieve your objectives, then it's, I think, fair and reasonable for me to be asking a question about them.

And until furthermore, you know, going back to the budget, you know, there's \$15 million here for science and licensing. You've talked about, you know, the education under way and — I forget what you called it — “promotion.” I think that was the word you used: “compliance promotion.” And so you know, how confident are you that this approach with these monies that have been

allocated to this program, that it's going to achieve the objectives that you've set for your agency in terms of protecting source water?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Ms. Ritchie, you asked about confidence in our approach. And I am confident in the Water Security's approach to compliance. When we talk about . . . We've spent much of our time here today talking about use of fertilizer, and if talking about confidence, I've got all the confidence in the world in Saskatchewan producers that they're going to continue to responsibly use fertilizer on their farms in a responsible way to optimize and improve their production.

I think in terms of the money that we've put into compliance promotion, you know, it's continuing to be significant. And I'll ask Thon to just expand a little bit more about some of the work that our environmental officers are doing with, whether it's municipalities or other entities, again to promote compliance to some of the regulatory requirements that we have.

Mr. Phommavong: — Thanks, Minister. I would add that not only we comply and do compliance promotion, but we make sure that facilities that are being constructed meet the standard, you know, to begin with.

So for example, in Saskatchewan we actually have one of the most stringent regulations for municipal wastewater, which is probably one of the largest, which is an also necessary industry, I should say, discharging sectors in terms of what discharging into water bodies. So we have the most stringent standards for those facilities. City of Regina, for example, have one of the most advanced treatment facility out there. And in fact, our data actually shows, after the recent upgrade, the water quality downstream is actually improved significantly.

So from that perspective, our policy and our standards and the mechanism that we have in place by working with municipalities to make sure that they install appropriate treatment and make sure they operate the facility appropriately by having a certification program appropriate for the facility.

City of Regina, for example, is a class 4 facility, and we make sure that they have qualified operators appropriate for the class so that their wastewater treatment facility operates optimally and discharge that meets, like I said, one of the most stringent, if not the most stringent, wastewater treatment process anywhere in Canada.

Ms. Ritchie: — Can you please tell me what led to the toxic algae advisory in Manitou Lake last summer in the middle of July? What were the contributing factors?

Mr. Phommavong: — Yeah, so Manitou Lake, just like any southern Saskatchewan lakes, naturally contains high nutrients. That just is the nature of the beast, if I can use that term. And when the condition is right, from time to time, you will have algal blooms that produce those toxics. In this case, we will monitor the situation. We know it was coming and we provide the advisory appropriately.

Ms. Ritchie: — So are you suggesting that that was sort of, in sort of the normal range of variability for the quality of that lake?

Mr. Phommavong: — I'm not saying that at all. I mean as you know, if you look at the . . . from the historical context. In fact I've been in Canada since 1981, and happened to be reside in Drake, and Manitou Lake is a lake that I used to swim on. So I know that lake and I don't recall having algal bloom advisory issued for that lake, not until last year.

So it's not a common occurrence per se to that degree, but given the fact that Saskatchewan lakes, particularly the southern lakes of Saskatchewan, naturally contains high nutrients and you will get algal bloom from time to time. This is why we have a program in place to monitor and to issue advisories so people can take proper precaution.

Ms. Ritchie: — So when that event occurred, did the ministry undertake an investigation to understand the changing conditions or factors that led to the event?

Mr. Phommavong: — Thanks for the question. We have the expertise within WSA and, like I said before, we know the conditions and we will continue to monitor the situation, not only in Manitou Lake but anywhere else, and we will issue advisories when we need to.

Ms. Ritchie: — Was there an investigation? Yes or no.

Mr. Phommavong: — We collected the sample for this incidence, yes. But it depends on what's your definition of investigations.

Ms. Ritchie: — Did you investigate the reasons and causes for the event?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — What we did was we followed the normal course of Water Security Agency practice. So we monitor, we see an issue that may affect use of that water body, we notify the public, and we continue to monitor it going forward. You're using the word, "investigation," but I think what we're trying to communicate to you is that we have conducted normal course of WSA business in terms of that water body.

Ms. Ritchie: — What sources enter into Manitou Lake?

Mr. Phommavong: — Manitou Lake is a terminal lake as you know. So it could be from runoffs. It's a historical lake.

Ms. Ritchie: — Are there any wastewater discharges that enter into the lake?

Mr. Phommavong: — No.

Ms. Ritchie: — So the only sources of water that enter into that water body are runoff. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Phommavong: — No. Manitou Lake, just like any other lake in Saskatchewan, it has many sources, right? So from precipitation, from rain and snow and probably some of them from runoff. But like I said before, the Saskatchewan soil, from the historical perspective, traditionally contains high nutrients. And it would be, in my opinion, irresponsible to contribute to the runoff from today's practice.

Ms. Ritchie: — Are there unregulated structures upstream of

Manitou Lake that enter into that water body?

[16:45]

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — In terms of Water Security Agency infrastructure upstream from Manitou Lake, you know, there's no structures that flow into Manitou Lake.

The one exception could be the SSEWS [Saskatoon south east water supply] canal to that, if flows are especially high in the SSEWS canal. You know, water from the SSEWS canal from the final reservoir there and . . . Sorry, the name's escaping me. But water from the SSEWS could flow into Manitou Lake, but that historically is a very rare occurrence.

Ms. Ritchie: — And you're referring specifically to Water Security Agency infrastructure. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Correct.

Ms. Ritchie: — And what about other types of land use changes — ditches, drainage channels, etc. — that could be contributing discharge into Lake Manitou? What do you know about that?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — You're talking about producer-owned assets or . . .

Ms. Ritchie: — Well I don't know. I'm just talking about anything that isn't owned by Water Security Agency.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Okay.

Ms. Ritchie: — Maybe a municipality.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Again, Mr. Chair, I'm sure you can understand it's, you know, it's difficult to speak to infrastructure beyond what WSA owns or regulates. As I said, you know, I mentioned the SSEWS canal in terms of WSA infrastructure being upstream from Manitou Lake. We're not aware of any municipalities that are putting water into Manitou Lake.

In terms of, you know, general drainage or things, you know, things draining into Manitou Lake, there is a relatively small catchment area that could drain into Manitou Lake. Again, we're not aware of any approved drainage right now occurring into Manitou Lake.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. So just so I have this straight, you're not aware. But when the incident occurred in the summertime, you didn't feel compelled to undertake any kind of an investigation to understand the reasons or the contributing factors to why there was this event occurring in a very unseasonal manner. And so you just don't know why we had such an irregular event, like, and you didn't undertake any studies to find out.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Well I don't think that's quite accurate, Ms. Ritchie. I think Thon outlined in a previous answer, you know, again we know that Saskatchewan soils especially in the south typically have a high nutrient load, so this is not necessarily an unexpected event. We know that algal blooms can be affected by wind conditions, temperature conditions.

Again, I think in terms of our responsibility as Water Security

Agency, again what I said earlier in terms of following our normal course of business — we monitored; we saw that there was a, you know, potential risk to users of the lake; we notified users of the lake of the risk; and then we continued to monitor the lake going forward. So I mean in terms of, you know, Water Security Agency's responsibility in that regard, I think we met that responsibility.

Ms. Ritchie: — It's been mentioned in the past, well first of all by the Provincial Auditor, their finding and recommendation that Water Security Agency collaborate with the global water institute. Did it occur to you to reach out to them and ask them for their opinion on this situation? And if so, what did they say?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Mr. Chair, I would just say that, you know, I've met with the Global Institute for Water Security. I met with them just recently and a couple times in my time as minister. We do work with that group on a regular basis and, I would say, are continuing to look for ways to look together with that group.

You know, in this specific case however, as I mentioned earlier, we have a significant amount of internal expertise at Water Security Agency. I mean Thon, on his team, he's got three people with Ph.D.s [Doctor of Philosophy] who have a proven track record when it comes to evaluating water quality, understanding water quality issues and challenges.

And so, you know, not that we don't work with other groups, Ms. Ritchie. But certainly when it comes to this, you know, this particular situation you're referencing, again at Water Security Agency we're confident that we have the expertise internally to deal with it. And we did so last summer.

Ms. Ritchie: — Well that's unfortunate because, you know, there is a wealth of expertise and I think the agency might have benefited from more in-depth conversations. I certainly know when I've spoken to such experts, they've been able to offer a lot of insights. And it's really frankly quite clear to me from these responses that more work needs to be done. But I'll move on in the interest of time.

So is the request for approval process . . . Now which line item in the Water Security budget does that fall under?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — That falls under the ag water management portion of our budget.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. And can you please tell me how many RFAs [request for assistance] are currently unresolved?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — So currently, Ms. Ritchie, we have 280 active request-for-assistance files at Water Security Agency. You know, in the last fiscal year we received 70 RFAs; 27 of those were completed within the fiscal year. We still have 43 of those 70 active. Of the 27 that were completed, 20 were dismissed and 11 were issued recommendations or involved in network drainage approval initiatives.

Again, a number still remain under investigation but, you know, with significant snow on the ground, it's difficult to complete those RFA processes. So again, 280 currently active RFAs with our agency, and some significant work being done in terms of completing ones that we've received in previous years.

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. How many of those active RFAs are over five years old?

[17:00]

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — So again, just, you know, we ought to pick some point to start from. So I'm just starting from the 2017-2018 fiscal, working backwards.

So we currently have 133 RFAs that are currently involved in a networks approval process, and then we have 33 active RFAs that we've received and are not yet currently in the approval process. And I'll ask Leah to maybe explain the difference between those two in a minute.

Again, you know, the priority by which we approach RFAs, there are several factors, including the age of the RFA, the vulnerability of the respective basin that has to do with how impactful the RFA and the affected land is, and then also just a willingness of parties or individuals to pursue alternative mitigation measures.

And so I'll just ask Leah to maybe explain the difference between the 33 and the 133 that are currently in the approvals process.

Ms. Clark: — So, Leah Clark, executive director of agriculture water management.

So the 133 that are involved in some part of the approvals process are working towards an approval. And that's just not an on-farm approval, that's an approval within a network. So we're looking at a drainage within the network that goes to a point of adequate outlet. So in lots of cases, there's many landowners and many pieces of land involved in that network approval. So it's actually bringing, potentially, into compliance a lot more than just the one RFA issued. They're quite complex. The 33 are . . . right now our team has to work towards getting those into approval.

Ms. Ritchie: — Just for clarity, how are you classifying those 33? I didn't quite hear that.

Ms. Clark: — Sorry, so those 33 have an active RFA against them.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — And they're not yet currently involved in a network drainage approval process. So that's where those 133 have gotten to a point where they're part of a larger network project and were in a more, I'd say, active and, you know, ongoing path to compliance for those 133.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. So you started off by saying 280 active. I asked how many are more than five years old. And so the 133 you mentioned, sort of in this network approval process, now you're saying that those have been . . . How does that relate to the question I asked? I'm confused.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Ms. Ritchie, you asked how many RFAs were older than five years. So currently, as of the date today in 2023, we have 280 active RFA files. But if we go . . . Correct me if I'm wrong, but you asked older than five years. So that's where I went down to the 2017-2018 fiscal and gave you the 33 number and the 133 number that are older than five years.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. Thank you very much for that clarification. I'm curious to know if the Water Security Agency is actively involved . . . If there is any monies from the Water Security's budget that are directed to the resolution and completion of those RFAs? And if so, how much and details?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — So as I specified with, Ms. Ritchie, your first question on this topic, this work sits in our agriculture services and economic development division of Water Security Agency.

The total expense for that division in this next fiscal year is about ten and a half million dollars, but again there's economic development and ag services. So if we focus on ag water management, the ag services aspect, that's a \$5 million budget for this year. That includes 36 FTE [full-time equivalent] positions within Water Security Agency. And within that 36 FTE, there's 7 FTEs focused, dedicated to compliance assurance, and that's an increase of one FTE from our last fiscal budget.

Ms. Ritchie: — I'm asking more about capital works. And in the past, I don't know, I'll say five years like . . . Sorry, I'll start over. Are any of these capital allocations listed in your budget for the year earmarked for resolving RFAs? Capital.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Yeah, Ms. Ritchie, in terms of capital dollars, there's no capital dollars as part of ag water management or, you know, supporting producers or landowners. As we work through the RFA process, again the capital expenditures that we have in our budget are on Water Security Agency-owned assets. So in terms of the networks or, you know, the individual projects that we're working with producers on, that's not WSA-owned capital. And so those are just purely expense dollars in terms of our efforts to try and help people resolve those.

Ms. Ritchie: — I believe there's mention in the budget for money to replace culverts and other, you know, channels. To what extent is the unregulated activity contributing to the need for those infrastructure enhancements?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Yeah, you know, in terms of the half million dollars in this year's budget, we refer to it as a pilot program — right, in my opening comments — to replace bridges and culverts. And again the focus of that program is to really — I mean those are our capital dollars — but it's to replace bridges or culverts that, you know, while not owned by Water Security Agency, they have a direct impact on Water Security Agency-owned assets downstream or nearby.

And you know, again, as we're seeing the age of water infrastructure around the province get older and need some investment to make sure that we can continue to operate them safely and, you know, without risk to surrounding communities, that's what that half million dollars is for in this year's budget. It doesn't have anything to do with the RFA process or network drainage approvals. These capital dollars will be specifically targeted at assets that are close to WSA assets to make sure that we can continue operating our 72 dams and 240 kilometres of channels.

And I'll just ask Shawn to provide a specific example.

Mr. Jacques: — Thanks, Minister. Like for example, like some

of the structures that we own, you know, are 60, 70 years old, and some of the bridges over our canals are end of life and need to be replaced. In fact there was one had collapsed last year. So that's exactly what, you know, the minister is speaking to; it's a program, a pilot program to help these municipalities replace that bridge that may be collapsed and to make sure that it doesn't impact the flow of water down that canal for the users of that canal.

Ms. Ritchie: — So just to make sure that I have this clear, are you saying that none of the monies for capital works identified in this year's budget are related to the resolution of active RFAs?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — That's correct. As I outlined earlier though, we do have \$5 million of expense dollars going towards our ag water management, our ag services branch. That's what they do each and every single day, is work with producers on active RFA files. And again, seven folks in our compliance area in that division in Water Security Agency, so there are certainly significant dollars going towards moving approvals through the process. They're just expense dollars, not capital dollars — key distinction, I think.

Ms. Ritchie: — Yeah, and could you break that \$5 million, perhaps you could break that down for me a little bit further in terms of how much that is for FTEs versus other things.

[17:15]

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — As I said, the budget for this specific area in terms of agriculture service is \$5 million; there's 36 FTEs total in that division. You know, in terms of the granularity of the line items beyond that, comprised to the rest of that \$5 million, that's perhaps getting a little granular for today. I will commit to following up with you on that and providing that information to you.

I mean another example of expense dollars within that division as we, you know, we have an Ag Water Management Fund of \$700,000. And so that's where those are additional dollars that we use to work with producers or networks seeking approval. And I mean some of those dollars may end up going towards, you know, capital expenditures for the producer or for the landowner, but they are not capital dollars to us again because they're not our owned assets.

So that's part of the \$5 million budget that we have but we'll certainly commit to following up with you to providing you more granularity on that \$5 million.

Ms. Ritchie: — Yeah, okay, thank you. Because I mean I would expect to see, you know, items for say, for example, public engagement or consultant services. I don't know what else, but those sorts of things. And so that the \$700,000, what did you call that?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — For Ag Water Management Fund. And perhaps I'll ask Leah just to talk a little bit more about that fund specifically.

Ms. Clark: — Sure. So the Agricultural Water Management Fund, it supports networks and producers for its approvals. It can also support RMs [rural municipality] in some of the

infrastructure, flow controls, erosion controls in some of those projects. So we're open to working with the applicant on different ways that we can help fund.

Other things that we cover include LiDAR [light detection and ranging]; QP, so qualified persons; and engineering services as well. So there's quite a large array of services that we will support through that program.

Ms. Ritchie: — Is it possible to provide me with a list of these sorts of network infrastructure improvements, if I can call them that, that Water Security has provided over the past five years?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — You're asking for what the \$700,000 Water Management Fund has been used for in previous years? Is that what you're asking, or am I misunderstanding?

Ms. Ritchie: — Well I understand that for the, you know, the current fiscal year, it's 700,000 and it can be used for a range of things, as was described. So what I'm asking then also is, going back five years, what were those expenses, you know, as they relate to ag water management and resolution of RFAs?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — I think it's important to specify here, you know, this is a relatively new program for Water Security Agency. You know, certainly we will endeavour to provide you with the information on perhaps the general allocation of what the monies in the fund were used for. The caution being that, you know, talking about specific projects, there may be commercially sensitive information there. But certainly we'll endeavour through Mark and his team to provide you with the detail that we can on that for you.

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I would be remiss if I didn't ask about the status of the wetland mitigation policy as it relates to ag water management. Could you please tell me the current status of that initiative?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — In terms of, you know, a wetland policy, I mean we have been working with different stakeholders and producer groups and consulting with them over the last number of months. And again trying to get to a point that I talked about earlier in my comments about an ag water management policy that we expect to bring forward before the end of this calendar year.

You know, that ag water management policy will inform the development of a broader wetland policy for the province. But certainly we've been undertaking quite a bit of work in terms of again this active engagement that we're having with producer groups. We've had a number of plenary sessions in Regina and Saskatoon. We have, you know, another plenary session coming up later in this month.

Well over 70 organizations have been consulted in terms of the ag water management policy. I believe that list is publicly available on the Water Security Agency website in terms of who has participated in the plenary sessions.

And as I said, once we get to a point with ag water management policy, then again that will inform wetland policy for the province.

Ms. Ritchie: — Oh, okay. Well that's interesting. So the wetland mitigation policy won't be part of that strategy that you mentioned. It'll come afterward and not in the current calendar year. What's the timeframe for that policy work? Do you have it done next year then?

It is an audit, Provincial Auditor finding. It's been on the books for several years. I honestly had expected that it would form part of this strategy, so would like to know what sort of timeline it is on and what you're able to commit to.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — No, on wetlands specifically, you know, there will be a wetland component to the ag water management policy that we plan to release this fall in this calendar year. You know, in terms of a stand-alone wetland policy, any potential for that would be formulated after the ag water management policy. But, as I said, in the ag water management policy that we will be releasing this fall, there will be a wetland component as part of that.

I mean, again, in terms of the timing, there's been significant engagement on this process. And that's clearly important because there's many interested parties around the province and different groups that want to provide feedback and have provided feedback. I mean, you know, again it's important as we do engagement to see how people are feeling about the engagement because if there's changes that we need to make in that engagement process, we want to do that.

You know, and that's where I would just share we've done surveys after our engagement sessions. I mean, 84 and 85 per cent of the participants have indicated that the revised framework and revised guiding principles, respectively, reflected the feedback that they provided in our engagement. And 100 per cent of respondents felt that they were able to provide feedback fully and completely.

So again we've really worked, undertaken over the last year to ensure that Water Security Agency can do fulsome engagement, is listening to people. And then the policy that we put out this fall will fully reflect that to the greatest extent possible.

Ms. Ritchie: — The agency is on record indicating that only 15 per cent of wetlands have been lost. Others question the validity of that figure. Could you please tell me what is the basis for that number?

[17:30]

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Sorry to throw more numbers at you. So the basis for the number that we're using — you talk about 15 per cent — we're using the basis of 47 million arable acres in the province of Saskatchewan. Now in terms of cumulative wetland retention, again by area we've retained 86 per cent on those 47 million arable acres in the province.

So in that data, I think it's important to note that data is based on information that we've provided as Water Security Agency, data from ECCC, data from Ducks Unlimited. We've cross-referenced this data, you know, so it's not one-point-in-time data. We've cross-referenced this data, and you know, had some informal agreement from those two other organizations that this data is reliable and the basis of what we're working on.

Ms. Ritchie: — Can I get a copy of that, please? I'd like to see the math.

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — What we can do is we can provide it in this PowerPoint presentation to you. That's been a part of our consultation work.

The Chair: — Having now reached the agreed-upon time, we will adjourn consideration of the estimates for Water Security Agency. And Minister, if you have any closing comments that you would like to make at this time?

Hon. Mr. Cockrill: — Thank you. I'd just like to thank you, Madam Chair, committee members, and certainly all the Water Security Agency officials who have joined me here today and that I get to work with on a daily basis in terms of managing water, one of our province's most important resources. Thank you.

The Chair: — Ms. Ritchie, if you have any comments you'd like to make?

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just also like to join with the minister and thank he and his staff for being here today to answer these questions and allow for a good discussion around the manner in which water is protected here in the province and the budgetary allocations for the coming year. Thanks to you all.

The Chair: — The committee will now recess until 5:45.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**General Revenue Fund
Innovation Saskatchewan
Vote 84**

Subvote (IS01)

The Chair: — Welcome back, committee members. We will now consider the estimates for Innovation Saskatchewan. I am Colleen Young, and I will be chairing this committee meeting this evening. And we have, sitting in, committee members Doug Steele, Ryan Domotor, Alana Ross, Ken Francis, and in for Jennifer Bowes is Ms. Betty Nippi-Albright. Thank you.

We will begin with vote 84, Innovation Saskatchewan, subvote (IS01). Minister Harrison is here with his officials. And I would ask officials to please state their names before speaking at the microphone, and Hansard should note when you're ready to speak so you shouldn't have to push any buttons. Minister, if you'd like to begin with introducing your officials and any opening remarks you may have this evening.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure. Thanks very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to committee members for being here this evening as well. And I am pleased to be here for the consideration of the 2023-24 estimates for Innovation Saskatchewan.

And here with me from Innovation Saskatchewan, to my right, Kari Harvey, our chief executive officer. On Kari's right, Brent Sukenik, our chief financial officer and vice-president of corporate services. Behind me, Avery Vold, vice-president,

economic development and research investments; and Debbie Haluik, our vice-president, research park operations. And with me as well, my chief of staff, Brady Peter.

Innovation Saskatchewan was established in 2009 with the mandate of advancing the Government of Saskatchewan's innovation agenda. It does this by providing recommendations and advice on research, science, and technology priorities, and by promoting and supporting the research and technology sectors in the province. To further advance its mandate, Innovation Saskatchewan now owns and operates two research parks in the province — one in Saskatoon and one in Regina.

As you may recall from last year's budget, our government announced the creation of a single innovation agency in the province involving the move of Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation, known as SOCO, also known as Innovation Place, under the authority of Innovation Saskatchewan. Since this announcement, Innovation Saskatchewan has been working hard to successfully integrate the two organizations. By integrating SOCO's research park infrastructure and services with Innovation Saskatchewan's mandate and programs, the province can better support the innovation ecosystem, resulting in the creation of jobs and the attraction of technology companies and research partners to Saskatchewan.

As of January 1, 2023 the two entities have been operating as one. Innovation Saskatchewan will now promote specialized infrastructure and programming in one comprehensive package. This will strengthen the organization's reputation, mandate, and programs, maximizing the economic potential of its research infrastructure assets.

Madam Chair, we know that our province's future economic success depends increasingly on knowledge and innovation. To help ensure success, Innovation Saskatchewan will focus on four key goals: (1) ensure funded institutes and research are creating economic impacts and are aligning with Saskatchewan's research and development priorities; (2) build and support a sustainable and inclusive technology sector; (3) focus resources into areas of strategic advantage and opportunity, such as ag tech and cleantech, to position Saskatchewan as a world-class innovation hub; and (4) make Saskatchewan the preferred destination for local, national, and international researchers, entrepreneurs, and tech companies.

To achieve its goals, the agency manages research and innovation investments on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan. It works collaboratively with industry and stakeholders to partner, fund, and support initiatives aligned with the government's priorities. As well the agency uses its research parks to enable collaboration and growth of the innovation ecosystem through flexible space and support of partnerships.

This fiscal year Innovation Saskatchewan will receive a budget appropriation of \$28.727 million. The \$93.5 million decrease is due to last year's one-time grant to facilitate the transfer of ownership of SOCO assets from the Crown Investments Corporation to the authority of Innovation Saskatchewan.

In 2023-24 the research park operations will continue to be self-funded through revenue generation. The budget continues to provide strong support for the innovation and technology sector,

which will play an important part in Saskatchewan's future economic growth while also allowing the organization to leverage the opportunities of the integration.

In 2023-24 Innovation Saskatchewan's strategic priorities will involve attracting, retaining, and growing the province's technology sector and supporting the commercialization of research. Madam Chair, this includes fully leveraging the research parks as an infrastructure tool to attract new technology companies and research partners. The research and technology parks have demonstrated their ability to do this for decades.

Since 1993 over 200 new technology companies started their businesses at the parks. Sixty-eight per cent of these start-ups are still in operation, and the majority are still operating in Saskatchewan. To advance strategic priorities, Innovation Saskatchewan will also focus on existing stimulus initiatives, funding, and programs. Innovation Saskatchewan's 2023-24 budget includes continued administration of the Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive, or STSI for short.

The STSI program was introduced in 2018 to incentivize investment into riskier, early-stage technology companies through a non-refundable 45 per cent tax credit to individuals, corporations, and venture capital funds that invest in eligible start-ups. Since launching, \$56.5 million of private investment has been attracted. In other words, the program has leveraged three and a half dollars of private investment for every dollar of tax credit approved.

This investment, Madam Chair, has accelerated the growth of our tech companies, creating 274 new jobs among 93 eligible start-ups. The program has also continued to increase the size of the province's investor pool. Three hundred and twenty-eight Saskatchewan investors have been approved under STSI, with 60 per cent of them new to angel investment.

The response to the STSI program has been overwhelmingly positive, with significant industry demand. In the 2022-23 fiscal year, the program saw a 20 per cent increase in the amount of investments submitted compared to the year before.

Madam Chair, you can see that Saskatchewan's tech sector is thriving. For instance, launched in winter 2021, Startup TNT, an organization that enhances access to capital for early-stage tech companies, connects angel investors with local start-ups. With support from Innovation Saskatchewan, it has raised over \$2 million for 19 Saskatchewan start-ups.

And local anchor tech companies continue to demonstrate accelerated growth. In February 2022, 7shifts, a local tech company offering scheduling software to restaurants, raised 101 million in a series C investment round led by SoftBank, one of the world's largest capital banks. 7shifts plans to use this capital to double its current staff complement of 160 people.

In September 2022, Saskatoon-based Andgo Systems, formerly NC Smartcall, announced their 5.6 million in a series A investment. Andgo Systems provides scheduling software for complex, high-volume organizations working with customers like the Saskatchewan Health Authority. The company now employs over 50 people.

Saskatchewan had another strong year in venture capital investment, ending the 2022 year with \$136 million in venture capital deals. This is the province's second-highest year ever recorded by the Canadian venture capital association.

Innovation Saskatchewan's 2023-24 budget includes the following continued important commitments aligned with our four strategic goals: \$1 million for the Saskatchewan Advantage Innovation Fund along with \$1 million for the ag tech growth fund, programs that aim to accelerate the commercialization of new technologies in ag tech, mining, energy, manufacturing, education, and health care; \$2.829 million for the Innovation and Science Fund, which matches federal funding for research projects at Saskatchewan universities, colleges, and research institutes; \$375,000 to Co.Labs, Saskatchewan's first tech incubator, to continue fuelling growth in start-ups as well as supporting the scale-up of Saskatchewan tech companies.

2022 was another record-breaking year for Co.Labs: 183 jobs created by start-ups in the program, \$8.9 million in investment was attracted — close to the last four years combined — and \$13.2 million in revenues generated, beating last year's record of \$9.5 million. In five years of operation, Co.Labs has incubated 170 start-ups who have created 690 jobs and generated \$41.4 million in revenue.

[18:00]

\$100,000 for the Innovation Challenge, a program where the government seeks technological solutions to public service delivery challenges from Saskatchewan's innovators and tech entrepreneurs, and the made-in-Saskatchewan tech program which enables Saskatchewan-based tech companies to pilot their projects. \$400,000 to the technology ecosystem program to advance programs and initiatives to meet tech industry labour market needs and advance sector growth.

Innovation Saskatchewan does this by working closely with its numerous partners and stakeholders to ensure these investments are successful. For example, to help attract and retain skilled workers and sustain this growth, Innovation Saskatchewan has been collaborating with ComIT, a non-profit organization that delivers coding and programming training for underemployed or unemployed individuals interested in pursuing a career in the tech sector.

In 2022, Innovation Saskatchewan partnered with ComIT to host two three-month coding courses in Saskatoon and Regina. Seventy per cent of graduates from ComIT's three-month coding course have gone on to gain employment.

Innovation Saskatchewan also partnered with Women Entrepreneurs Saskatchewan, WESK, in 2022 on its Founders Table program. This program means to support the growth of women-led technology companies in the province. It does this by providing increased access to funding resources, networks, mentorship, and business advising. Since January 2022, almost \$1 million of investment has been raised by participants and over \$200,000 in grant funding has been received.

Being proactive and collaborating with key stakeholders is critical to ensuring the province's tech sector thrives. In 2023-24 Innovation Saskatchewan will also continue investing \$3 million

in Canada's largest ag tech venture capital fund, Emmertech. This is part of the \$15 million commitment announced in 2020 to invest \$3 million per year over five years in the fund managed by Conexus Credit Union. The goal with this investment is to ensure that ag tech start-ups in Saskatchewan have access to local venture capital to continue scaling and growing in Canada and around the world.

This fund has also demonstrated its success in attracting additional investment. In 2022-23, Emmertech invested in Lucent Biosciences. This novel micronutrient developer and manufacturer is establishing a \$19 million manufacturing plant in a joint venture with AGT Foods in Rosetown. Emmertech's nearly \$6 million investment in companies in Saskatchewan has attracted a combined \$60 million from investors outside of Emmertech.

Saskatchewan has a natural advantage in agriculture, and now Saskatchewan is taking its rightful place as a global leader in ag tech. For example, Croptimistic, a Saskatoon-based ag tech company who uses autonomous soil mapping to support precision farming, has 67 company partners executing their business model in four countries. This company received a \$300,000 commitment from Innovation Saskatchewan's Agtech Growth Fund, and it's an STSI-eligible company. In early 2023 it closed a series B round of \$9.4 million. Our programs are making a difference.

Innovation Saskatchewan will also continue our core operational funding of \$4.149 million to the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization, known as VIDO. This funding, in addition to our previously announced \$15 million, will support the establishment of Canada's Centre for Pandemic Research in Saskatoon. The project is currently in the design phase with construction expected to commence later this year. The centre will include a vaccine manufacturing facility which opened in June 2022. While VIDO is still securing the necessary licences required to operate, this manufacturing facility will be able to produce 40 million doses of vaccines per year.

The addition of level 4 containment capacity, which will be only the second in Canada, allowing VIDO to work with any pathogen, and a new animal facility capable of housing a wider range of animals, will expand preclinical research and development capacity. These important enhancements will attract new talent, develop the next generation of scientists, and will support researchers from Canada and around the world to develop vaccines and therapeutics for humans and animals.

Additional ongoing research-specific funding commitments in this year's budget include: \$4.1 million for the Canadian Light Source, a major national science facility at the University of Saskatchewan; \$2.5 million for the Sylvia Fedoruk Canadian Centre for Nuclear Innovation as it continues to lead nuclear research in the areas of medicine, agriculture, energy, and materials; \$1.675 million for the Petroleum Technology Research Centre, which provides project management and funding support for research into enhanced oil recovery and CO₂ storage; \$256,000 for the industry-led International Minerals Innovation Institute, which supports digital mining transformation; and \$4.849 million to the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, which provides funding for high-impact and peer-reviewed health research relevant to the province. By

maintaining funding levels to research institutions, Innovation Saskatchewan is supporting our world-class researchers, infrastructure, and community.

In 2023-24, Innovation Saskatchewan will continue to leverage the Saskatchewan advantage, building a strong and sustainable innovation ecosystem that supports our companies from start-up to scale-up. We will work with research and industry partners in our province's network of international offices to take Saskatchewan's innovations to the world, and to attract new international technology companies and investment within our borders. Saskatchewan will continue to be the place to develop a technology company and undertake advanced research to solve global challenges.

Madam Chair, this concludes my remarks, and I welcome any questions the committee may have on these estimates. Thank you very much.

The Chair: — All right. Thank you, Minister. And I'll open the floor to questions from committee members. And I'll recognize Ms. Nippi-Albright.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — I thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you too, Minister, for your opening remarks, and welcome to the CEO and the others.

Just thank you so much for this. I know we've had a long day, long day. I'm sure you guys had a long day of being grilled with questions, so I will . . . Oh, okay. I am lost. I had my . . . Here we go.

So one of the questions I have and just kind of wanted to start out with is . . . Just one second. So you've received the same amount of money but have a broader scope. How will you do that without making cuts, or are you planning on making any cuts?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I'll maybe introduce part of the response and I'll leave it to Kari and Brent, may want to expand. But with respect to the financial allocation, the member is quite correct in that it is the equivalent amount as last year. Our mandate really hasn't changed though from last year. The same allocation of resources to each of the programs and constituent programs is continuing forward.

But Kari, I'm going to maybe ask you if you could go through some of the details on that. We have a whole number of different programs. I just touched on some of them, and you know, we're happy to kind of get into details on the different ones, whether it be the agtech fund or SAIF [Saskatchewan Advantage Innovation Fund]. And there's a whole number of funding envelopes, programming that in a lot of cases is provided by Innovation Saskatchewan, with a lot of the work though being the work that the organization that we are providing those funds does.

So the Fedoruk Centre, for example, we're not doing the nuclear research at IS [Innovation Saskatchewan], but Sylvia Fedoruk is. Or the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, we provide SHRF [Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation] with the annual allocation and the experts on the SHRF board make the decisions as to where the funding will be most advantageous and which projects and researchers will receive it.

But sorry, I've gone on too long. Kari, you can go forward.

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah. Kari Harvey, CEO of Innovation Saskatchewan. Thanks for the question. What I would also add to what the minister has already shared is that, you know, really the integration process of bringing the research parks under Innovation Saskatchewan doesn't really change our mandate. The research parks themselves actually do generate revenue themselves to pay for the operations, so we are able to maintain all of the previous levels of funding that the minister had outlined in the opening remarks and also just now. But in terms of the actual infrastructure that we now are responsible for with the research parks, it is generating its own revenue to cover off costs.

We are also just, you know, obviously going through that process of integration where we can find out where we might have areas of efficiencies and savings. Certainly the whole intent of the decision to move the parks underneath Innovation Saskatchewan was not an exercise in downsizing or cutting. It was really to create better alignment between two organizations that were already very much working with the same stakeholders and partners, and just really creating that alignment.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you. I'm new at this, with Innovation, so just remind me. The one-time funding last year of 93.5 million increase last year was for the transfer of this SOCO ownership to Innovation, is that correct? Okay, perfect. Okay, that I got. I was like trying to wrap my head around that.

So just some update on the changes at Innovation Saskatchewan bringing in the function of SOCO. So tell me a little bit about . . . Is there like other than, like I know you've said in your opening remarks, gave a lot of like, okay, how do I . . . I wish I had your document here and I'd be like highlighting and marking. But just kind of some updates on some changes at the Innovation Saskatchewan bringing in the function of SOCO, can you just elaborate a little bit about that?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure. No, I'm happy to give an answer and then probably expanded on by Kari and Brent as well. Very good question. And you know, partly what I'm going to ask Kari and Brent to talk about is . . . I think for a lot of people who may be watching as well, the accounting and how that 93.5 million and how the actual transfer was accounted for might be of a degree of interest. Because I think anybody who's looking through the Estimates book, and they'll see in the estimates a very, very significant reduction in budget from last year of over ninety-three and a half million dollars and would, you know, probably jump out at a lot of folks saying, well holy smokes, the budget went from 115 to 27. Something dramatic happened. So I'm going to ask the reason for that.

And it really was to do with an accounting entry and how we did the transfer from CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan] over to Innovation Saskatchewan. And it takes a bit of a technical explanation to go through it, but I think we probably should. And as far as kind of how the, what the value is and why we did that, I think that merits an explanation as well.

And you know, a big part of the reason really is being able to market around the world our innovation infrastructure that we have under one roof and be able to really bring a start, an incubator to, you know, a very significant physical infrastructure

and support that goes along with that under one package and under one roof. And we really felt that there was going to be significant synergies and advantages that was going to result ultimately at the end of the day in more opportunities for entrepreneurs here in Saskatchewan.

So maybe I'll just ask Kari and Brent if . . . or perhaps, you know, one of our other officials as well, I mean, to talk about the accounting part of it, how the 93.5 million worked and then the rationale behind the change as well. So however you want to manage that, Kari.

Ms. Harvey: — Sure. Maybe we'll start with the \$93 million transfer and I'll have Brent speak to that.

Mr. Sukenik: — Brent Sukenik, vice-president, corporate strategy and services and CFO [chief financial officer] for Innovation Saskatchewan.

So the \$93.5 million appropriation was to essentially purchase the investment from CIC. Crown Investments Corporation had an investment. And actually I'll back up a step, and it goes back to if we go back almost 20 years. At one point in time there was a transfer of all of the assets and debt from Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation to CIC, to the GRF [General Revenue Fund].

[18:15]

And then back in 2011 all of those assets came back to SOCO through CIC. And through those accounting transactions there was an equity advance of approximately \$120 million. And from the period of 2011 to 2022, Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation was drawing down on that investment. So we were making annual, mostly annual payments to Crown Investments Corporation. The \$93.5 million was what was left at the time of the transfer. So Crown Investments Corporation held an asset from SOCO. We had the liability. When the announcement was made to amalgamate the two, the transfer, so the 93.5, came to Innovation Saskatchewan, was paid to Crown Investments Corporation for that investment, and then Crown Investments almost immediately paid it back to the General Revenue Fund.

So that was the, I guess, the accounting side. It was really just a whole series of accounting transactions that happened over the last 20 years.

Ms. Harvey: — And so to the question about the rationale and the opportunities for, I guess, leveraging this decision, I think, as I mentioned previously, both Innovation Saskatchewan and Innovation Place were really innovation-driven organizations. We had many of the same stakeholders that we worked with, whether it was universities, some of the start-up companies, some of the research institutes or associations — very, very similar groups that we worked with.

I think by aligning and merging our two organizations, from I guess a client perspective it creates a lot more clarity and understanding around, you know, who you should be working with, as you can appreciate as well. I know we were named Innovation Saskatchewan. They were named Innovation Place. Often it was very confusing for stakeholders. So I think that this can remove some of the confusion around who is leading the

innovation agenda for the province. And so that's, you know, again that's one element.

The minister also spoke to the opportunities that we really see on leveraging the world-class infrastructure that we have. Not only at the research parks, but also in the vicinity of Innovation Place in Saskatoon, we have a number of — I think it's 23 different, or over 20 anyways — different research institutes and major science facilities. And what this will do is, allowing us to work together, we can be more efficient in how we're developing that story and that narrative and taking out to the world those opportunities to come and start your business or do your research here in the province.

We have an example of that that I would share. I think we may have raised this last year as well, but a company called NRGene, which is an Israeli-based company from Israel, is a company that has set up their Canadian, North American subsidiary or their office at Innovation Place. And that was really a story of, you know, again government working to identify potential companies that wouldn't be a fit for our ecosystem here.

Innovation Saskatchewan provided some funding to NRGene for research if they set up their office here in Saskatoon, in Saskatchewan. And so since that occurred, that company has since grown. I think it was in 2021 when they announced, or 2020 when they announced that they were going to open their office. They made the decision to move to Saskatoon. When they opened in 2020 they had one individual, and now they have I think over 20 people that are working for them.

So again I think that the opportunity really is here for us to do more of that and to really package all of the things that we have to offer in taking that out to the world. And that's what we would like to see, is our parks being a soft-landing spot for companies that want to access the market here in North America. And so we see again some real alignment there.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you. I would be interested in you elaborating a little bit more. So Innovation Sask is a landlord at both these places. So it's interesting just hearing a little bit about how others have come in. I'm curious to know and hear more a little bit about how that function of being the landlord for both places, how you've incorporated your mandate. You've given some examples, and a little bit more would be . . . I'd be interested to know.

Ms. Harvey: — So what I would say is Innovation Saskatchewan had a provincial mandate for working with tech companies across the province. Innovation Place had the mandate of working, you know, primarily with tenants and, I guess, understanding what their needs are in terms of I'll say programming as well.

Innovation Place, we're a landlord, but it's more than just the space, right. It's about creating that community. It's about programming that we provide to support the companies that are located in our parks. It's about partnerships that we have established with, you know, various organizations to provide basically an economies-of-scale situation where our companies can access credits of, say like Amazon, or we have partnerships with I think it's 26 different organizations — everything from accessing reduced discount rates on software, like Salesforce or Hootsuite, to providing discounted access to services on how do

you do recruitment. So things like that, and then again just creating that community.

So as Innovation Saskatchewan with that broader mandate of the province, as you can imagine there would be a lot of alignment and overlap between what the needs are of a start-up company working in the park versus say a start-up company working in Moose Jaw or maybe in Regina or Saskatoon but not in the park. And so what we've seen is that, you know, whether it's something like, again, support and understanding how to do, you know, sales scaling, you know, sales development of your staff, it's a common need that's across the whole province and not just within our start-ups or our tech companies in the parks.

And so that's where we can see those real synergies, right. If we're delivering a program, it's for the broader sector but it also incorporates those that happen to be located in the park. So that's just another example for you.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you. Thank you. So your occupancy rate at both Regina and Saskatoon, like how has it been, of course, increasing — we'd hope it'd be increasing — and some of the challenges or even just market rates have . . . Tell us a little bit about that.

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, maybe I'll have Brent maybe speak to this question as well.

Mr. Sukenik: — Thank you for that question. We've seen in the parks the vacancy rate has been increasing over the last several years. That is very much the same as what we see in the marketplace. So both in Saskatoon and in Regina in the general office we see those percentages going up. We see that in our parks. We do see a lot of ebbs and flows with our space. We have a lot of specialty space. Those tend to have very low vacancy rates, but our office vacancy right now is quite high, comparable to market, but quite high.

As for a reason, there isn't one reason. There's a lot of things that go into the marketplace. If we look at our current vacancy, our current vacancy is really the result of some larger tenants either downsizing or vacating the province or our parks. And even that, there's reasons for it. Some of it is cyclical business purposes. Some of it is buyouts; so a company gets bought out by a competitor or merges with a competitor and relocates to another park.

So there's a lot of reasons for the increased vacancy. I can say that the vacancy level right now, it decreased slightly from last year. So it's going in the right direction now, and we are forecasting that to go down again next year, but it is still quite high.

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah. Sorry, I was just going to add to that that I think the other reality is just the change in work, right. And what we're seeing is some of those technology companies — as a result of the few years in COVID — have either maybe decided to just reduce their footprint or . . . But that certainly is a contributor as well.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — So of all the tenants that you have there, how many are provincial, fed, or private? Do you have a percentage of how many are federal or provincial agency or

private sector?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Maybe just by way of introduction, I would say that there's a mixture of all. But I think Kari and Brent both have the data, and I think we can go through it in some detail if you wish.

Ms. Harvey: — Yes, so I have a few facts that I can share with you. So in terms of sector, what we see is — and this is combined between Regina and Saskatoon — about 26 per cent of our tenants are in the ag tech space, 5 per cent are in health and life sciences, 12 per cent would be industry services and support, 37 per cent are information and communication technology, and then 20 per cent is natural resources.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. I was quite curious of who are all the tenants.

So just from last year's estimates, last year the ministry mentioned that the province will have to address a shortage of skilled technology workers in the province to lead to growth. So what initiatives were undertaken in the last fiscal year, and at what cost?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I appreciate the question. It is a good one. The reality is that across all sectors of the economy, we continue to have as a very real challenge a shortage of not just skilled technology workers, but really a shortage of workers right across the entire spectrum. And we're hearing that and seeing that from industries, you know, whether it be the tech sector, whether it be hospitality, and everything in between. So that is a challenge.

And you know, we've taken a number of initiatives to address those challenges in, I would say, a macro context, one of which has been around credential recognition. That's one of the significant ones, in addition to the fact that we're adding training seats. So I mean, what I've talked about is seeing kind of an all-of-the-above approach to how we can address the labour market challenge that we have.

Number one is making sure that people here in Saskatchewan have every opportunity to take advantage of and to enter into the labour market either for the first time or to upskill and move up in that labour market through new credentials or training. So that is number one, and I would say particularly focusing on groups that are under-represented in the labour force. And that has been a major and significant cross-government initiative, so it's not just Immigration and Career Training or Innovation Saskatchewan or Trade and Export. I mean this is Education, Advanced Education, and all, I would say, even more broadly across government than that.

So number one, are our people here in Saskatchewan able to take advantage? Number two, it means international in-migration, and that's been our entire immigration approach. That was why we put the immigration accord forward to the Government of Canada which, you know, after significant and real discussion and negotiation, I think we have gotten most of what we had asked for in the immigration accord.

There is still some distance to go on some elements of that, but having a very large increase in our provincial nominee allocation

is a significant step to addressing the labour market shortage that we have. Having additional control on the selection component without the redundancies that went into that selection part on the provincial nominees is another significant advance as well. Control over settlement funding will be important too.

But credential recognition is a significant thing as well, whether that be credential recognition for those relocating from within Canada or from those who have relocated from outside of Canada or those who have had international credentials that they just have not been able to get recognized by regulatory bodies.

[18:30]

So actually we're going to be making a further announcement on this tomorrow, which actually I'll maybe talk about. But yeah, the formal announcement will be tomorrow, the basis of which is that we have a time period in which regulators will have, and it's actually a regulated period of time, so legally binding time period to give an answer. So a completed application is submitted. There will be 20 days in which to have an answer received by the person who made the application. If they have an internationally obtained credential, that period will be 50 days to receive an answer. If the answer is not in the affirmative, the regulator will have the obligation legally to provide a very detailed reason as to why the application was not successful, and include with that a remediation path meeting: here are the course or courses that you would need to take to have that credential recognized.

And in addition to that we are providing for health care workers right now — this will be the announcement tomorrow — we will be providing up to \$6,000 per application to have that credential upskilled. So whether that's a course at Sask Poly or a college or whatever the case may be, we would pay for up to \$6,000. And that would be available to a wide variety of applicants.

So you know, all of that to kind of get to the member's question, which is a good one: what are we doing to address the shortage of those able to move into the jobs that are available. Really it's an all-of-the-above approach that really cuts across government ministries, but you know, really is quite focused though on the three pillars of making sure (1) our own people can get these jobs, (2) those moving from outside of Canada if they want to relocate here, and (3) those coming from abroad.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — I thank you for that. In my former work, I used to work in the health sector. And it's music to my ears to hear that credential recognition is something that is important, considering I worked in the health sector for a long time before and saw a lot of challenges in recruitment and retention, and folks that were coming to Canada that didn't have the credentials we had. Anyways, so that is music to my ears.

So, just kind of what I would like to know is, like if you could expand, if you even thought about something like post-secondary funding in terms of just our own home-grown training — like the post-secondary training — is that something that you have thought of or considered?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, absolutely. And I appreciate the kind comments from the member as well. It absolutely is. And this will be, I'm kind of happy to get into much more detail in in the Immigration and Career Training estimates, but I'm happy

to, at least at the high level, address the question through it.

But we have allocated significant additional resources to training seats. We're going to be adding 400 training seats this year and likely more going forward into the future, and that's through the apprenticeship training system. So not just kind of the seats are being added, but the apprenticeship training allowance that goes along with that is being significantly increased — millions of dollars.

I don't have it right in front of me because it's an ICT [Immigration and Career Training] initiative, but we are making very, very significant investments into the apprenticeship training system. And you know, that will go across . . . it won't be just kind of one particular trade. But this will be a part of how we're going to address some of these challenges that our partners in the tech sector are telling us about as well.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you.

Ms. Harvey: — I just wanted to also add that, you know, with respect to the tech sector specifically, in Innovation Saskatchewan, we have a \$400,000 program called the technology ecosystem development program. And that program is used to help support or to fund initiatives, I guess, that would address some of the challenges that the technology sector is facing. So of course, you know, as you rightly noted, labour is a significant issue in the technology sector and in the STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math] fields, frankly, in general.

A couple of things in addition, I'll share a couple of examples of some of the projects that we've funded. But in addition to that — and just to build on what the minister has also said — we work very closely with our partners in Advanced Education and Immigration and Career Training to identify . . . And you know, there's an organization called SaskTech that also provides advice and guidance to those ministries as well.

And so what we've seen as a result of some of the discussions that they've had with our technology sector stakeholders is the introduction of coding and robotics into the classroom which was announced a number of years ago, probably about three or four years ago. So that's now part of the curriculum from K [kindergarten] to . . . or I think actually grade . . . don't quote me on this, but I believe it's from grade 7 to 12, but it might be K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12].

And then in addition, the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program, there was a tech talent stream that was also added a year ago or so. And so there's a few, you know, specialized, targeted initiatives there just as examples. Also I do know that the University of Saskatchewan has also increased their seats in the computer science program as well.

But with respect to the 400,000, some of the initiatives that we've funded over the years is a commitment of \$600,000 to WESK to support the growth of women-led technology companies. So this is the Founders Table. And as of September of 2022, there's a program called the Getting Started in Tech stream. It had 12 participants, and then there's an operating stream of the program that had 25 participants. And nine of those founders have gone on to join Co.Labs or Cultivator. So they've taken their idea, and

they're now in the technology incubator.

We fund — and I think the minister mentioned this — we've funded ComIT, which is a three-month sort of accelerated coding program that really targets under- or unemployed individuals who are interested, who may have a tech background but maybe not . . . like a science background but not, you know, training in coding. And this is very much an industry-focused program where the individual that runs the program talks to the industry to understand what kind of coding program is relevant for right now. And that's why we see 70 per cent of the participants go on to employment.

And another really interesting thing to note is that what we're seeing with that program, there is, you know . . . A lot of newcomers that are coming to the province have gone through that program and have been able to access employment in high-paying jobs in the tech sector.

We also have partnered with ComIT as well to work with upscaling . . . and SaskGaming, to look at upscaling some of their staff, in particular their Indigenous workforce, in working in the tech sector and understanding how to work in a tech role. And so those are just again some examples that I wanted to share specifically that we're involved with that target the tech sector.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Okay. It was going to be in my question, but I was going to wait further down. And I'll ask it because you kind of spoke a little bit about it in terms of Indigenous folks. So I'm particularly interested in how the research and technology sector in Saskatchewan is advancing economic reconciliation. So can you, do expand on that a bit.

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, so of course we report on Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action as government. And some of the things that I'll share specifically that have been shared over the years, there's been a provision of scholarships to Indigenous students pursuing STEM education at the University of Regina and University of Saskatchewan.

We've partnered with SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies] to host students from their power engineering program in work placement situations at our energy centre located at the park. We are a charter member of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce Indigenous Engagement Charter; we signed on in March of 2021.

And in addition, when SOCO was under the umbrella of the Crown Investments Corporation there was a Indigenous cultural awareness program that was being delivered. And we had 100 per cent of our employees participate in that program, as well as 93 per cent of them have confirmed their reading of the 94 Calls to Action.

And then I do have a number of other initiatives. So Innovation Saskatchewan has funded a program called RoboYou and RoboX. We like to pilot things and then, you know, show some results and then have others come in and carry on the funding for these programs. And this is one example of that.

So in 2018 we piloted this program called RoboYou, which was in two First Nations communities in Saskatchewan. Basically this program was to expose Indigenous youth to technology and

really pique their interest in STEM-related fields. And over the course of five months we had 80 students who were given hands-on learning experience of computer programming in robotics. They were able to engage in problem solving, critical thinking, and just exploring their creativity.

And so at the end of that program we did an evaluation, and we really shifted the focus of that program to focus more on teachers rather than students because we felt their reach could be much broader.

And so we rebranded the program and provided and worked with SaskCode, which is delivered through the Saskatoon Industry Education Council and the Saskatchewan Science Centre. We provide them with a total of \$125,000 to deliver the program. And so this, the RoboX, involved the distribution of robotics kits to students and teachers in northern Saskatchewan, and incorporated coding and robotics in their education and the curriculum. So really it was about equipping teachers to be able to work with students.

And in terms of the results of this program, we had 136 educators that received this training who represent 19 different schools in 13 northern communities. And educators from eight northern communities have signed out robotics kits following their training sessions. So again, that's one example.

We've done . . . I would say we've focused quite a bit on youth and Indigenous youth. We have funded a number of different coding camps, some delivered through the Regina Open Door Society. We funded an Indigenous in STEM summer camp in 2021, which was with the educating and youth in engineering and science program. That's through the U of R [University of Regina], and that really targeted youth who reside on a federal reserve in Saskatchewan. And so we saw seven communities and 175 youth participated in those camps.

And then we also, you know, reach out and we try to participate and speak at events where it's appropriate. I spoke at the Indigenous Agriculture Innovation conference that File Hills had organized, and you know, to speak about opportunities in ag tech. And so those are again some of those examples that we've engaged in.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you for that. There's like a few comments, on just what you shared there. One of them is, I used to work in the health sector and we used to have these cultural awareness programming, and it was mandatory for staff. And at the end of the day, change didn't happen regardless of how much awareness you took. When I did my own master's program looking at how change happens, the cultural awareness programming that's mandatory for non-Indigenous people or new employees just is not effective.

[18:45]

However having said that, like you've said here that you've gone and done a lot of programming out in the communities to expose young people to the tech sector, to engage them. And you've also provided opportunities for educators to teach their students. And I actually know one of them. When you were talking I was like, I know one of those folks.

But one of the things that often happens — and I wonder how are you going to address that — is you can expose somebody to something and you can pay for a camp, pay for all of that. Where do you get the traction to have that individual say, well I am going to go to this six-month program, a year program, go to university?

Like internally we're very good at engaging new Canadians, those that have arrived here, because they've brought those skills. But when we're working here with those that are underemployed, Indigenous people, how do we . . . Like especially our young people. We talk about the young people all the time, and we want them excited. We want them here.

But I don't see many Indigenous people saying, okay, I'm going to go and study this, and like . . . Because you went to SIIT, you've gone to the different communities, how do you sustain the interest for them to get that, to sustain that traction for them to actually say, this is where I want to go; I want to go in this tech sector? How do you do that? Have you found ways, innovative ways to attract young people or adults in to have an interest in this area?

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, you know, it's a really good question. And I would say that we definitely have a lot more work to do there. And we know the statistics. You know, Indigenous participation in the tech sector is less than 2 per cent, right. It's not where it needs to be.

I think one of the challenges, and I think why we focus so much on some of the youth initiatives is that, you know, it really does start downstream in terms of creating students that are really interested and excited about opportunities in technology, in the STEM fields. And I mean, it's a challenge for, I think, our Indigenous youth. But it's a challenge in just creating, you know, frankly getting others — youth, whether it's women, you know — to think about those opportunities.

And it really does start with the education. Because STEM is technical, you need to start by taking your biologies, your chemistries, your physics, you know, when you're in high school so that you can position yourself to move into that sector and to position yourself for that advanced training in the post-secondary fields. So that's where we really, we see creating that excitement and creating that interest. And so that's why we focused on that awareness piece as a starting point.

But we definitely have more work to do I think in terms of real engagement there and getting that traction, and it's certainly on our radar. And it's important to us to ensure that we do have, you know, STEM and a technology sector that's reflective of our communities, right?

And so all that to say, I guess, you know, we haven't found the answer yet but we certainly know that there's more work to do. And we're committed to really looking at that and working with our partners on how best we can do that, whether it's with SIIT or others. So that's what our, you know, our focus will be moving into the future.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you. The Innovation Saskatchewan has been designed to create some economic impact. So last year, I know the minister talked about the amount

of jobs that are supported by Innovation. So how many jobs does Innovation see to help create this coming year? How many are going to be created?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, no I very much appreciate the question and, you know, had an opportunity to go through a little bit of that in the opening statement. And we tracked this very carefully — direct job creation through Co.Labs, through our investments in the agtech fund, through SAIF, through all of the different investments that we make through IS. And I mean, there's a very, very significant multiplier as far as the investment that goes into that. And I'll ask Kari to maybe go through a bit of that.

But you know, I would say from kind of a high-level policy direction, you know, we made a decision probably . . . You know, we created Innovation Saskatchewan in 2009, but we really did make some significant and important policy decisions between that 2009 period and where we're at today, about how we were going to create the conditions for a private sector tech industry really to develop and take hold here in the province, but how we could do that by creating the conditions for that to occur with a combination of incentives, whether that be on the tax front or through things like Co.Labs where there's space, but also where we could create the conditions for individuals to take risks and to be able to feel comfortable in doing that.

Really, I mean where we've seen tremendous growth in other areas around the world in the tech sector, I mean it really has been, you know, a couple of people out in the garage messing around with whatever. And that's really . . . You know, people have changed the world. And you know, we wanted to find a way that we could create the conditions for those sort of innovations to occur and, you know, leveraging some government investment in order to do so. And you know, that's going to be a continuing objective of the government going forward, and we're always looking at what new ideas or what new policies or what new training measures might be appropriate at any given point to incentivize that investment further.

So we're never going to say that, you know, we've absolutely accomplished what we set out to do. This is one of the spaces where there is going to constantly be changing and innovation and program tweaks and, you know, all of these things which we're always listening to the sector, what might work better.

And I think actually the sector would be, you know, very open about saying that that's been the case, that we are always endeavouring to improve. And we really never seek to be entrenched in any particular position because we want to make sure that we're being as innovative as we can by listening to those folks who are in that space right now and innovating and creating jobs.

But you know, Kari, if you want to kind of maybe speak to the individual programs and, you know, the impacts that they have had? Because we do track this in a very careful way.

Ms. Harvey: — Yes we have. Yes we do. And we track, you know, the . . . What's that word? Over the long term, we track these projects that we fund, and that's part of our reporting requirement for our various . . . particularly our grant funding programs.

So with respect to Co.Labs, so what I would say as well, like we don't have specific targets. So to your question about, you know, how many are we targeting to develop, we don't have specific targets. Part of that is, like we're in the middle of our planning process. We're, you know, a newly integrated organization. But you know, having targets and having those conversations will be something that we're looking at over the coming months. But we do definitely track results.

And so when we look at Co.Labs as an example, since 2017, which was the year that Co.Labs was opened up, and in terms of the numbers that we're looking at, we've seen over the course of each year roughly, you know, anywhere between about 23 to 37 start-ups that have been incubated over each year. Some of those are companies that would stay in the program year to year, but a lot of them are new companies as well.

So in total we've seen 181 start-ups that have been incubated. We've seen 690 jobs that have been created by these start-ups in Co.Labs. And then in terms of sort of other ROI [return on investment] numbers, I guess if you will, 29.4 million in venture capital has been raised by those start-ups. And in terms of the revenues that have been generated by those companies, it's \$41.4 million. So that's Co.Labs.

The Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive — and the minister spoke to that in his opening remarks — which is a program, it's an angel investment tax credit program which is really aimed at encouraging investment in early-stage technology companies, where they're, you know, at their greatest risk in terms of development. We've seen some pretty impressive numbers. This is actually one of the most aggressive angel investment tax credit programs across the country, and we've seen some really good results from that.

So since that program launched in 2018 we have seen 56 million or about 56.5 million of private investment has been attracted, and what we've seen is . . . and what that is comprised of is 27.7 million of that investment was raised under the STSI program. But what we saw, which I think is really an impressive number, is that even more investment, 28.8 million, was raised outside of that program. So bringing in additional investors at, you know, maybe from other provinces or, you know, or the States, or what have you.

And so we've seen through that, 274 new jobs were created. And in terms of the other spinoff of, you know, really the value of this program is creating more comfort for angel investors in the province. And so we've seen 328 investors that have been approved under that program.

So again those are pretty significant numbers that, you know, we feel are really making an impact in terms of helping those really early-stage companies, you know, get through that challenging period before they can start to really scale.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — You spoke about how you're just tracking your results and tracking over a long period of time. I'm curious to know, like, how often your PDSA [plan-do-study-act] cycles are triggered, or is that an ongoing . . .

Ms. Harvey: — It's an ongoing . . .

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Ongoing.

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, it's ongoing.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — So that's good to know. So okay, I better move on with my questions. They'll be like, Betty.

So last year it was mentioned that there were plans for a geothermal research project through the Petroleum Technology Research Centre. Can you give some updates on that?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — We'd be happy to. Kari, maybe if you want to speak to DEEP [Deep Earth Energy Production Corp.].

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, you bet. Well PTRC [Petroleum Technology Research Centre] actually partnered as well with . . . I'm just trying to find this here. They actually partnered with the city of Regina as well to look at doing a study on the potential of geothermal heating in the city vicinity. So I know that that work has been completed, and I believe that's also been part of the information that's been a part of the planning process for, you know, all the various infrastructure projects that the city of Regina is looking at.

DEEP itself, so yes, DEEP actually received some funding, some initial funding through Innovation Saskatchewan to help advance the development of their technology. And they, you know, are now at a point where they have received, they've been able to secure additional significant venture capital funding and are, you know, positioned really to start. You know, they do have their technology down to a point where I think that they're going to be able to start producing soon on a commercial scale. And PTRC has been working very closely on sort of the whole geothermal file as well.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — So just on that, like is there any plans or interest in working and partnering with First Nation and Métis communities, to be a partner in that?

[19:00]

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Maybe I can take an element of the question. And with respect to kind of DEEP particularly, I mean beyond that initial funding element, we really aren't kind of the owner of the project, so to speak. So I'm speaking to the operational or corporate structuring of how that works. We really can't kind of speak to that particular project.

But what I would say as a kind of general policy response on behalf of the government . . . And it's a good question. Actually I spoke to this at the SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] convention a couple of weeks ago as well. But you know, I really believe that the future of both energy and resource projects in this province is going to include Indigenous equity participation in the projects. I really believe that's going to be the case. And I think it is going to be the case because it makes sense for it to be the case from a whole host of different elements — you know, economic, social. And frankly to get projects done I think this is how we're going to need to work together. This is actually going to be what economic reconciliation looks like. It's going to be partnerships that are not just kind of partnerships in name. They're going to be actual, real, legal, economic partnerships where everybody is going to

succeed together or everybody is going to have the same economic challenge because a project isn't working.

So you know, we really did think deeply about this. And I would say this is an area I really have tried to think through in, you know, 20 years in public life now: how can we get to the point where this becomes a possibility? Because for a lot of Indigenous organizations, companies, governments, it's very difficult. Because the reality is, there is market failure in this area in the really textbook definition of market failure, in that Indigenous companies and governments can't borrow against equity, can't borrow against owned property. Because anything either located on a First Nation or that is a chattel that could be relocated to a First Nation, you can't borrow against because banks will say, well we can't realize on collateral, right? This is actually an area of market failure.

So what we decided to do, now last budget was where we allocated the resources, but we created the Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation. And the point of the corporation is to really stand in the place of where a financial institution would otherwise stand in providing capital resources so that Indigenous organizations can become equity partners in projects going forward.

And I would say kind of in a, in again a textbook or theoretical context, what the answer would be or what you would get from academics or political scientists, they would say, well, sure, I mean that's the case but that would really be a place where the federal government should be standing in as the institution that would be providing that mechanism. And I mean the reason being the constitutional division of powers around the issue.

So we though decided, well, I mean we're not going to wait around for the federal government to move into this space. And they haven't for, you know, a hundred years. Why would they start now? So we really did make a decision as a province that we were going to move into this space and allocate real resources. I mean \$75 million initially, and you know, I'm not making any announcements or anything, but I suspect that's not going to be a hard cap going into the future as well. I think we're going to see some very real success that comes from the SIIFC [Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation] going forward which will mean that we'll be able to move probably in a more substantial way into that space.

I do think that the federal government have a role as well. I think ultimately you will see, you know, whatever government stripe it is. Actually the Conservatives actually included an element of this in their last federal platform, that they would also create an Indigenous investment corporation of some mechanism, and there'd obviously be some policy design work that would go into it.

But I think ultimately you will see a federal government that is in this space in a substantial way. You will see other provincial governments . . . and Alberta has a somewhat analogous organization as well in the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Commission. But this really will be the way in which, as government, we are able to — and not just we, you know, at the provincial level, but I think governments across the country — our best position to use as a tool and how we can create these partnerships where Indigenous governments and companies and

organizations can be a part of these projects.

So you know, that's kind of a very high-level policy answer on a specific question about a specific project, but it's something I feel strongly about. So I'm not sure, Kari, if you want to speak to, kind of the particular project or not, but you know, I think, you know, my answer is that we're really not kind of directly engaged in DEEP organization.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you for that. Yeah, it is interesting you raised the investment fund and I've had some Nations reach out and there's some mixed reaction with that anyway.

But what I wanted to go into is the Canadian Light Source. So I toured it. When I was doing my master's program, I toured it and I thought, whoa, this is a very big building. So what are the . . . Funding from the province was 4.1 million last year, and I just want to know . . . So what are the priorities for the upcoming year, federally or other?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I mean I'll maybe kind of just give a high-level introduction and then Kari can speak to it. But yeah, we are allocating in this budget 4.1 million to the CLS [Canadian Light Source], which is consistent with the allocation that we have put forward, by and large, for about a decade or so. I think we had one year where we had allocated more as kind of a one-time supplement to the CLS.

The federal government, you know, obviously are a very significant funder of the CLS through their CFI, their Canadian Foundation for Innovation Major Science Initiatives Fund. The amount of that allocation has varied over the years, and I think, you know, we would be looking for some clarity as to where that is going to go from the Government of Canada's perspective as well. And I think CLS would be quite interested in that also. But, Kari, maybe if you want to add to some of that.

Ms. Harvey: — Sure. So the Canadian Foundation for Innovation just last year announced their funding decisions related to their major science initiative facilities, of which Canadian Light Source of course is one of them.

There had been . . . As you're probably aware, there had been this, you know, kind of conversation about how these big projects are actually funded. And I know that there's a lot of discussion happening right now with the federal government and with the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, but also with the science community as well to understand what is the best funding mechanism for these major science infrastructure facilities. Because the sense is just that those aren't . . . It's not necessarily the best model as it stands right now.

So in this case, what I do know is that the federal government has approved funding for three and a half years for the Canadian Light Source, and the funding is pretty comparable to what they've also received in the past years, but I think the intention is that by the end of that three and a half years that there will be a sense of what that funding mechanism is going forward.

So it's very clear that there's a commitment to the Canadian Light Source. There was conversation, you know, around is there, you know, should a fourth-generation light source be

developed, and I think that, you know, again there is conversation as well about that. But really the point being that there is a commitment to the Canadian Light Source and to that infrastructure here in the province. And so we just need to understand what those funding models are going to look like going forward.

So you know, but the funding as it stands right now is quite consistent. But you know, we definitely work really closely with our federal counterparts to understand sort of those kinds of decisions and thinking that's happening.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. And I would just add for the committee's information as well that Kari's actually on the board of the CLS, so Kari is very well aware of all of the goings-on and represents the province of Saskatchewan very well at that board level.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you. So we'll move on to the International Minerals Innovation Institute, so the IMII. So again like last year, the funding from province was 256,000. And so again, what are those priorities for this coming year?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. Again maybe I'll just lead off. And Kari can speak to the details. The funding is 256,000 again this year for IMII, and you know, really IMII, you know, has a mandate to work with partners. And there's a number of members of the organization that also are funders and partners in how the institute works, and you know, partners as well in deciding what projects will be funded by IMII going forward.

And really kind of the idea being that there will be investments into advances in technology and process in the industry that will be a benefit for the industry in a general context, not any particular company per se, but that there will be really kind of advances of general application.

You know, I think that we've had some very, very good discussions with partners on this as well about what paths forward are going to look like, but it, I think, is very fair to say that we remain very committed to working with industry and partners in industry and how we can work with them to create conditions for them to even be more successful.

And you know, the companies that are operating here really are the most sustainable mining companies in the entire world who do an incredible job, who are responsible for creating tens of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of economic activity every single year.

And you know, we're kind of seeing the importance of the role that, you know, members of this organization, for example, play in feeding the world. You know, backfilling a lot of the fertilizer production that came offline from Russia and Belarus in the potash field particularly. But this is an industry that is, you know, not just important economically for Saskatchewan, which it really is, but really plays a very, very significant security role — food security, energy security role, given the importance of uranium as well — for the entirety of the western world.

So, Kari, if you want to maybe speak to IMII specifically.

Ms. Harvey: — Sure. Yeah, so I think what we're seeing in

terms of the focus of IMII, and to the minister's point earlier, we do have representation on the boards of all of our funded institutes so that we can be, you know, very well plugged in to understanding and being able to share provincial priorities and to share our views as, you know, strategy is being developed for those various organizations.

I think with IMII, they've, you know, really been focusing on the . . . In terms of the research, in addition to the research priorities that the minister was speaking about, they're also looking at the issues of labour as well. And so one of the things that they have initiated with Sask Poly is the development of a micro-credentialing course to upscale digital skills of those working in mining, in the mining companies.

And so I think what we're going to see is the continuation . . . In terms of the priorities of that organization it will be to continue, because again they are looking at challenges with labour force. And so they are looking at how can they encourage more people, how can they help ensure that those people that are currently, or that will be working in the field, have the digital capacity. Because again, you know, all industries are becoming technology industries, and so I think it's, you know, it's important for those to understand how is technology impacting the mining sector.

And then the other thing that I would say is that they are also looking at, you know, really engaging with their industry members about what are some of the significant sort of real-world problems that they're having challenges with and looking at how can they help support, you know, through things like innovation challenges, help them to tap into technology and development of new technological solutions to help support, you know, the mining sector solve some of those big problems or challenges maybe that they're having.

[19:15]

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you for that. I was actually, as you were speaking, I was thinking about in that sector in this particular area where the challenges to, I guess the technology challenges and the more use of technology versus what I myself and others my age would be used to, right, where as we are getting older . . . Like, what measures are in place to ensure that people's capacity, especially those of us that are aging, say getting older, how do you help with their capacity to continue doing the work they do until they no longer have to work?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I mean Kari can probably speak to some of that in additional detail, but you know, I would kind of just say by way of a general observation, you know, a lot of the mining companies have, you know, done a tremendous amount of work and the way mining had been done 30, 40 years ago would probably be really almost unrecognizable to the folks who were down underground in those days versus how it all works today. And the advances and investments that have really been made, not so much by government, but by the companies themselves, and they've seen, you know, value in maintaining their ability to produce at a high level but also in making sure that their workforce is both as safe as they can possibly be but also, you know, using technology to be even more productive.

And you know, I think that there in a lot of ways has been a pretty virtuous circle in how all of that has worked. I mean government

has a role as regulator as well of course, and that making sure that we are, you know, at the forefront. And I think that's really been something that as government we have endeavoured to do in working under a number of different ministries that have regulatory functions in the space.

But I would really give the vast majority of credit in, kind of, the improvements and advances to the companies that are working in the space and working together in a lot of ways too. I mean companies, you know, obviously are competitors in some ways in a market sense, but in a lot of ways they are collaborators as well, especially when it comes to occupational health and safety and ways of making sure that they are doing things as safely as they possibly can. So you know, I would just kind of offer that, I guess, in a general context. But Kari, if you want to add anything, feel free.

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, I agree with what the minister said. You know, a lot of what we've seen is companies taking action. What I would say though is that the role that we may play in this is really to help even pathfind or create some connections and matches.

So as an example, a number of years ago we connected an organization called Lighthouse Labs which, again, it's sort of like a company that specializes in boot camp-type courses that support the technology sector, you know, I guess in a broad sense.

And they were based out of Ontario, and we made a connection between Lighthouse Labs and with Sask Poly to look at a kind of partnership there. You know, perhaps Sask Poly could work with them to deliver some of those kind of boot camp-type classes that individuals who again are interested in maybe moving into the technology sector or learning more about UX [user experience], UI [user interface], or coding, that they have that opportunity to take those micro classes or courses and programs that can perhaps get them enough of a skill development where they can move into that sector.

But it's really the industry I think, and us managing partnerships. We don't really fund, we wouldn't fund those broad-based kind of initiatives, generally speaking.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — So the funding from last year was 4.8 million for the Saskatchewan health research centre. Again it's the same as last year so again similar. Is there any changes in priorities or is it . . . Like just to help me understand.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — No, I appreciate the question. And the funding is identical to last year, and it's been at that point for about four or five fiscal years, I think, that we've had it around \$4.85 million. You know, SHRF has over the years too had different and varying levels of non-government support to the organization as well.

And I mean really, you know, what they are seeking to do . . . And their board really makes the decisions as to where those funds are going to be allocated and they do that, you know, really looking for where they can have the biggest impact. And they do that in the scientific context of peer-reviewed health research that's going to be relevant to the province. I mean, that's really kind of what their mandate is. So you know, we have

representation on the board. And I forget if we appoint one or two members to the board of SHRF. I'm not sure.

Ms. Harvey: — There's Advanced Ed and Health as well that are . . .

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. Yeah, and it's all done through kind of an order-in-council appointment process, but there's nominations that come from different organizations that have different roles in that. But really, government doesn't make the financial decisions as to where the resources allocated are going to be distributed to other projects. That really is done by the board, looking for that impact and doing so under the rubric of peer-reviewed research. So Kari, if you want to speak further?

Ms. Harvey: — Sure, yeah. Just to add to that, I know that, you know, on a yearly basis, SHRF does look at trying to be focused on where they're going to put money into research. And so you know, from year to year, it might have been mental health one year and then a couple of years later they'll focus on things like, you know, MS [multiple sclerosis]. So again to the minister's point, it's the board that really makes those decisions. But by and large, those are again associated with priorities of the province as well.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Good. So the VIDO-InterVac [Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization-international vaccine centre]. So you gave some core funding last year of 4.1 million. So can you give me some updates on the vaccine development centre?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well we can. So we've been kind of working with VIDO on how some of the initiatives are going to roll out over the next number of years. And I think we've got the vaccine production facility that's largely operational. It's a much larger scale project though. And really it's focused on moving VIDO into being a class 4 laboratory, which I think the only other one in Canada is in Winnipeg, at the national lab in Winnipeg.

And so we will be the only additional one and a lot of that had to do, as far as the funding, in creating the conditions in which animals can be handled at that level 4 capacity or capability, which meant that we've had to do a significant amount of actual infrastructure investment into it. And I think it's actually . . . I don't know if we've said, it's modelled a little bit on how Oxford University is set up and how their infectious disease laboratory is actually structured.

So you know, there has been a significant amount of federal investment in this as well, and we work closely with the federal government on this. And you know, I've publicly said, my colleague François-Philippe Champagne who has been personally quite involved in this as well, and we've spoken on this repeatedly over the years. So you know, very much a joint initiative between the province and the federal government and obviously the university being extremely involved in the city of Saskatoon as well in creating what is going to be a significant national institution going forward into the decades to come.

But, Kari, if you want to kind of speak to the details though, that would be helpful.

Ms. Harvey: — Sure. So there are a number of different

components to Canada's Centre for Pandemic Research, one being the manufacturing facility. And so the manufacturing centre itself actually is completed. It was opened in June of 2022, last June I guess. And actually, as of March 21st, the first inspection was completed in the manufacturing centre by federal officials, and they passed this inspection with flying colours actually. And in fact, you know, it was shared that the inspectors were extremely impressed with the facility and commented on their exemplary operations and their biosafety and standard operating procedures that they have in place.

So what will now happen, however, it's not . . . There's still commissioning that's happening for the centre. So what will happen now is that the Public Health Agency will now be required to issue an additional licence that will happen after the first batch of vaccination is produced. So they will go through the actual manufacturing process which will then allow them to obtain additional licensing. And then from there, that will allow them to handle large quantities for level 2 pathogens which, again, that's a critical first step for them to be able to actually start producing, and bringing potential companies that are interested in coming to work at the facility. There will be another series of licences that they will work on getting that will allow them to work with level 3 risk group kinds of diseases as well.

What we do know as well is that they have received a lot of interest from Canadian and local companies that are very interested in working at the facility. And in addition to that, VIDO is working with the Edwards School of Business as well to develop a revenue model or a business plan for what that facility will look like.

So once they do have approval they will be able to manufacture all types of vaccines, both animal and human, which will again allow them to actually go, on the animal side, from bench research to commercial production, and on the human side go from bench research to phase 2 clinical trials.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — So do you have like a projected timeline of this, when it will happen? Within 12 months, a year, one to three, one to five years? Do you have a . . .

Ms. Harvey: — I don't know what the timing is of that particular process. In addition of course, though, there's the construction that's happening at the facility for, you know, the animal housing facilities and upgrading the facility to the containment level 4.

So what we do know is that the design process right now is such that they will be going for additional cost estimates sometime in the fall. And so construction itself won't start until, you know, probably early 2024.

So you know, it will be at least a year for construction, and then again commissioning processes will have to happen again after that.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, and I would just add as well that the federal funding is in place out until 2029. The CFI, the Canadian Foundation for Innovation MSI [major science initiatives] funding is in place till 2029. So you know, there's going to be a period in which capital is going to be deployed into the construction and development of the centre.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you. So let's move on to the Sylvia Fedoruk Canadian Centre for Nuclear Innovation. So again like last year, like there was 2.5 million last year funding from the province. Was there any additional funding from the federal government? And also would that 2.5 million that was given last year, like, is there any change in upcoming . . . Is there any upcoming priorities? Has there been a change? Or is it again up to the individual?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — No, I'm happy to kind of again do a bit of an introduction on that.

[19:30]

So you know, we've committed to a five-year funding agreement with the Fedoruk Centre that went into effect at the start of the 2019 fiscal year. So you know, really in accordance to that, we're going to be providing funding over that five-year period of time — and we have been — at that \$2.5 million annual rate.

The Fedoruk Centre has had, you know, different abilities, I think, over that period of time to raise revenue privately. And there's, you know, actually a really interesting history on some of the initiatives that really have come out of the Fedoruk Centre, which I won't get into a huge amount of detail. It's really very interesting though, some of the initiatives that have come and the fact that, you know, really we have a history in this province of really leading in nuclear medicine. It's an extraordinary story. It's something that we really, I think, can be very proud of as a province over, you know, 60-plus years of leadership in this space. And the Fedoruk Centre really is continuing that leadership role.

But, Kari, I'll turn it to you. I mean, you're an expert in this. It's very interesting. We don't need to get into all the details, but there's some very interesting things that the Fedoruk Centre is doing.

Ms. Harvey: — Mm-hmm. Yeah. You know, obviously one of the big benefits of having the Fedoruk Centre in the province here is really to help supply the isotopes for the PET/CT [positron emission tomography/computerized tomography] scans, of course. So you know, we've seen scans for clinical diagnosis of over 2,600 cancer patients with the FDG [fluorodeoxyglucose] that's been produced at the cyclotron facility. And so we've seen continual increases in terms of the number of patients that can be seen through . . . can take advantage of the PET/CT scans.

In terms of what the priorities are, I would say that, you know, they are definitely in the process of developing their next sort of business plan in terms of the evolution of the core and the strategy of the facility. And so they are in that process right now, but to what the minister had mentioned, part of that strategy is being able to generate commercial revenues, right. And again, they have been able to sell some of their isotopes as well for PET/CT scans to other provinces to support diagnostics in those provinces as well.

And then as the minister was mentioning, like the medical, the focus on the medical, nuclear medicine side of things has been really significant. We've seen projects related to, you know, targeting cancer treatments and diagnostics. We've seen some research that's focused on Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.

And so you know, really I think one of the initiatives that was funded a few years ago between again ourselves — so we put \$800,000 in and the federal government through well PrairiesCan now but what was Western Diversification previously — was the development of the innovation wing, which again allows for clinical trials to happen. And so we expect to help see some commercialization happen out of even some of the research work that's being done.

The infrastructure is now in place there. I think they are probably a little bit behind where they might have wanted to be, largely because of, you know, COVID and not being able to utilize the lab space in the way that the researchers may want to advance that work. But I think those are some of the things that we are going to see in terms of priorities moving forward.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — [Inaudible] . . . was very interesting. I'm sitting here thinking I've got to go learn more about that. I just have a couple more questions in terms of funds. So the Saskatchewan Advantage Innovation Fund, how many applications have been received? How many have been approved? What is the cash value? And can the committee get a list of those? Is that possible?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I mean the short answer is absolutely. I think we publicly make available the recipients for SAIF. I'm fairly certain we do. And I think, you know, last year we had about 13 applications. Is that right?

And we don't make the . . . I mean at the government level, cabinet's not deciding who's successful. I mean this is based on an external advisory committee who make recommendations as to projects based on submissions that would be viable and probably . . . I mean they really make the adjudication recommendation.

Yeah, I think there were two that were recommended by the external advisory committee last year. But there have been, over the last number of years, over 30 that we have had projects that we have funded over the last, you know, seven, eight years I think, somewhere around there. But, Kari, I mean you can speak to this as well.

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, so the way that the program works, we have a million dollars, and that's been sort of a consistent fund or funding level that we've had over the past number of years, so we're constantly . . . As you can appreciate, some of the projects that we fund run over more than one year and so it's, you know, that constant sort of managing the cash flow, right, in terms of the numbers and the amount that we have available for new projects. And so I would say 100 per cent of our funding is allocated every year. We definitely never have a problem with the demand for that program.

But as the minister mentioned, I mean he already talked about the number of applicants and the number of funded that we fund out over the years but, you know, we do tend to announce those funding commitments as well. And you know, whether we have a running list I'm not entirely sure on our website, but certainly it's public information for sure.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Just with that like I'm wondering, I know some projects that . . . So is this commitment a one-year

commitment that you offer, or is it over a two-year or three? Using your \$1 million available, how do you . . .

Ms. Harvey: — It can be any of those. Typically they run over two, like a minimum of two years. We've had some that have run over three years. Generally we have two intake periods per year, so one in the spring and then one in the fall. And then, as the minister mentioned, the review process would happen from there.

So you know, the process involves really having an expression of interest shared so that, you know, if it's not a project that's either a fit under the program or just for various reasons wouldn't go on to the next stage, we're trying to ensure that there's not sort of . . . individuals aren't wasting their time and developing, you know, an in-depth proposal. So we go through an expression of interest process. Then there's, you know, a short listing and then we go back and have those companies provide a bit more detailed list I guess, or a detailed application.

But what I would say is that the project itself — again this is another one where we see quite a bit of leverage — we only fund up to 30 per cent of the value of the projects, the total project value. There has to be additional funding that is brought to the table through either the company working with partners, maybe potential customers that are going to be interested in trying or piloting a project, or you know, of that nature. But you know, we do see some significant leverage in that. So I think it's about 277 per cent leverage in what our funds are able to leverage in additional funds for the project.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, and I would maybe just add as well to what Kari's saying, you know, we have some significant criteria around SAIF, and the 30 per cent element is one of that. I mean there has to be really a private sector proponent to doing that as well. And so they obviously have to bring significant resources to the table, which really from kind of an overall policy approach means that, I mean, it's de-risking for them but it's also de-risking for us as a province with the intention of creating innovation in whatever industry there is.

And that's one of the criteria as well, that this, whatever the application is, really has to show significant technology risk. It can't be, you know, funding something that is already very highly established as far as a process. There actually has to be a technology risk involved in this. There has to be a significant benefit if it's successful going forward, not just for the individual company but there needs to be a significant benefit for the province, which means additional jobs created, those sorts of initiatives.

And we also have a lifetime cap in place, such that if you're making application through SAIF or through the STSI program or other sources, the cap is \$450,000 lifetime, so you know, the overall program design being that we want to incentivize innovation and risk-taking in the technology front that's going to create benefits for the province overall.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you. Thank you for the refresh. I used to be one of those folks sitting on the other side taking all these proposals in. And it was a nice refresh, yeah, reminding me of the process it takes to fund different projects and to also show us what impact that they will have with the investment.

I have one just very quick question here, and this is the same question with the made-in-Saskatchewan tech program. So if you can in one minute, minute and a half, say like how many applicants have been received and were there pilot projects awarded and the cash value.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure, I mean we can speak to that. And this is really kind of an interesting program. And I would just say too, by way of time, we started a couple minutes late so if we go a couple minutes over, I think that that's fine to make sure we get the full two hours in for official purposes.

But you know, MIST [made-in-Saskatchewan technology] really has been a program that was designed to assist start-up tech companies by selling their projects or their products to government, whether that be through Crown or executive government agencies, to really get them off the ground with a first customer. And you know, I think there have been some really kind of interesting success stories on that front. I think about that . . . I forget what it is.

Ms. Harvey: — Ora.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Ora. Yeah, that was really quite . . .

Ms. Harvey: — A wearable safety device.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Right. That was very interesting and, you know, as kind of how we can, again speaking to the overall policy element, how we can use government procurement to really incentivize and create conditions for tech start-ups to be successful. But Kari, maybe you want to speak to it as well.

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah. So again the process that we go through is we have a committee that will do an assessment on the technology company to ensure that they're eligible, because we do want to make sure that those companies have a product, one that they're taking to government. This isn't a co-development situation. However, that being said, what we have found is that some of the companies that have ended up working with government have seen opportunities for almost to branch out their technology in, you know, a different way.

And so a couple of examples that I can just share with you: so for example we have a company that's called SkillShark. And SkillShark, their thesis really is about providing a technical option for evaluating a sport, like athletes. So sports teams can evaluate athletes. And so they were an approved company under the MIST program, and they engaged in a project with the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure to use the SkillShark's software as a way of managing their executive talent inventory.

So they did complete the project, and I'm not exactly sure of the status right now, where it's at, but this is the opportunity for them to have, you know, to get some really in-depth feedback from potential clients, to rework and to really position their technology from a business perspective and, you know, from a sales perspective. And so these are the programs that, you know, we get feedback from, those start-ups that have been really instrumental in helping them along their journey.

[19:45]

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Wow. Thank you so much for the time that you have taken. And the more that we went into this, the more intrigued I am, the more that I want to delve right into these. It's very interesting. And I just want to say thank you for answering and coming this evening and sitting with us. So that's all the questions I have, so just thank you so much.

The Chair: — Are there any questions from any other committee members at this point in time? Yes, have you got one? You go ahead. I'll recognize Mr. Francis . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yeah, it's okay if you have a question.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — We have agreement from the committee that we've got our time in. I think we're good to go. But I would just like to take the opportunity as well to thank you very much for very good questions and a very good discussion. I really do appreciate it. And this really is an extremely interesting area of public policy, and it's really a very significant area where, you know, I think we're going to see a lot of growth into the future. And it's about how we as government can work with our partners in the private sector to really make that growth as significant as it can be.

But I really want to thank our leadership team. Kari, thanks so much. And Kari's been leading our team at Innovation for quite some time now — I'm not exactly sure but a number of years — and Kari's done a remarkable job in really building the organization and expanding the organization and, you know, really done great work with Brent in bringing both SOCO and Innovation Saskatchewan together as well.

And through Kari and Brent to the entire team at Innovation Saskatchewan, I want to say thank you as minister for the great work that you do. I really genuinely appreciate it and have taken a lot away from it and hopefully learned a couple of things. But the real experts are the folks here in this room and the folks who work at the agency.

So with that, I will say thank you, and thank you to the critic. And thank you to you, Madam Chair, and thank you to committee members for being here tonight.

The Chair: — Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates, we will adjourn consideration of estimates for Innovation Saskatchewan. And that concludes our business for today, and I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Francis so moves. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 19:48.]