



STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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Mr. Jeremy Cockrill
The Battlefords

Mr. Ken Francis
Kindersley

Mr. Terry Jenson
Martensville-Warman

Mr. Delbert Kirsch
Batoche

Mr. Doug Steele
Cypress Hills

[The committee met at 19:00.]

The Chair: — All right. Good evening, everyone and welcome to the Standing Committee on the Economy. I'm Colleen Young and I'll be chairing the committee this evening. We have joining us here tonight as well committee members Jeremy Cockrill, Terry Jenson, Delbert Kirsch, Doug Steele, Erika Ritchie in for Mr. Belanger. And Mr. Ken Francis will be joining us later on.

Because we are still implementing measures to facilitate safety in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, if the minister needs to confer privately during proceedings, he may do so in the hallway or the vestibule at the front of the Chamber. And as a reminder, please don't touch the microphones. They are fragile and sensitive. The Hansard operator will turn your microphone on when you are speaking to the committee.

Cleaning supplies are located at the tables by the side doors for members and officials to use if they require them. If you have any questions this evening about logistics or have documents to table, the committee requests that you contact the Clerk at committees@legassembly.sk.ca. Contact information is provided on the witness table.

Tonight our committee is also tabling a list from the Law Clerk of professional association bylaws filed with the Legislative Assembly between January the 1st, 2020 and December 31st, 2020 which have been committed to the committee for review pursuant to rule 147(1).

The Law Clerk will assist the committee in its review by submitting a subsequent report at a later date. However in accordance with rule 147(3), committee members may also decide to review any of the bylaws of professional associations and amendments to bylaws to determine whether or not they're in any way prejudicial to the public interest. The document being tabled is ECO 3-29, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: 2020 professional association bylaws filed.

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

Subvote (WS01)

The Chair: — So now we will begin our consideration of the estimates for the Water Security Agency. Vote 87, Water Security Agency, subvote (WS01). Minister Bradshaw is here with his official, and if you would like to introduce your official and make your opening comments at this point in time, Minister.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to provide details of the Water Security Agency's planned work for 2021-22. I'm joined this afternoon — or this evening, I guess — by Kevin France, vice-president of agriculture services with the Water Security Agency; and from my office, Angela Currie, my chief of staff.

Joining virtually are some of my officials from the Water Security Agency: Shawn Jaques, interim president and CEO [chief executive officer]; John Fahlman, senior vice-president and chief engineer of technical services; Laurier Donais, interim

vice-president of finance; Thon Phommavong, acting vice-president of regulatory services; Ali'i Lafontaine, general counsel of legal services; Patrick Boyle, executive director of communications; Clinton Molde, executive director of irrigation development; and Doug Johnson, executive director of special projects.

WSA [Water Security Agency] is a really unique entity in Canada. We're one of the very few jurisdictions where all the government's core water responsibilities are united under one organizational umbrella. Public safety will always be an imperative. Things like protecting the public's municipal drinking and waste water systems are core responsibilities. They can never be compromised. WSA must also protect the sustainability of our water resources, safeguard against floods and droughts, and help preserve our natural habitat.

But that role must be balanced against the need to ensure it is also facilitating economic opportunity. A notable example of that is the Lake Diefenbaker irrigation expansion project. We are excited as a government for this generational and transformational project to add to 500,000 acres of new irrigation capacity to our province. Several branches of government are participating together to lead this project. These include: Water Security Agency and the ministries of Agriculture, Highways, SaskBuilds and Procurement, Trade and Export Development, and Finance.

The first phase of the Westside rehabilitation project has started with Clifton Associates selected as a prime consultant in an open competition. Important first steps will be engaging with First Nations and Métis communities and other stakeholders such as rural municipalities. 18.9 million was allocated for capital irrigation expansion in this year's budget. That funding will allow Clifton Associates to begin field testing for soil suitability, confirm topographic elevation information, and begin geotechnical drill program. Work will also continue to determine environmental assessment requirements.

Some of the benefits of this overall initiative is expected to include an estimated 40-to-80 billion increase in the province's GDP [gross domestic product] in the next 50 years, an additional 20 billion in tax revenues to support public services such as health, education, and social services; and an estimated 2,500 construction jobs a year over the 10-year build phase. As you can see, these projects are transformational for our province. In addition to the economic benefits and job creation, it will provide Saskatchewan and Canada with unparalleled food security. And it will support climate change adaptation and resiliency through using the available water from Lake Diefenbaker to drought-proof the area.

WSA will also continue to sustain agriculture through the continuing evolution of the agricultural water management strategy. As any of us who have spent time in the agricultural sector knows, drainage is a historical, long-standing, and often contentious issue. Our government was the first in decades to propose new regulatory solutions to water management. While the new approach of having drainage approved is gaining traction, additional work is needed with our producing community. That means listening to producer concerns as well as providing education and training.

WSA will continue to focus on the network approach. This brings groups of producers into approval at one time, as community water issues are seldom confined to 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 program on the ground.

WSA has collaboratively developed workshops with partners to introduce farmers to innovative agricultural water management and drainage solutions. At the same time, WSA will continue to work on a practical mitigation and wetland retention policy as part of the strategy. WSA has several initiatives directly aimed at helping our local communities adapt to climate change as well as do local improvements.

A few weeks ago Premier Moe announced the enhanced cost-share program for channel clearing. The budget provides 1.5 million to this municipal priority. There is \$500,000 for flood damage reduction programming. This includes reactive and pre-emptive measures to mitigate damage due to flooding. A further quarter of a million dollars will go towards community flood mapping. This information is vital in community planning for extreme weather events. WSA will be supporting this through improving its flood and drought response plans as well.

We also appreciate the work of many local non-profit community partners in water management. That's why we have allocated 820,000 to 11 local watershed groups to support responsible drainage and activities that support safe drinking water in our regions. WSA also operates a provincial system of 72 dams and 130 kilometres of conveyance channels. These require ongoing maintenance and capital upgrades. Many of them are decades old. In the WSA capital budget, 47.6 million is designated for a number of infrastructure and maintenance projects, including 6 million for the construction of the east spillway, an outlet at Highfield dam; 7.5 million for repair and rehabilitation of Gardiner dam; and 3 million for repair and rehabilitation of the La Ronge dam.

Lastly, 20 years have passed since Walkerton, Ontario and North Battleford water-borne outbreaks, something we remain very mindful of today. Since then great progress has been made. We continue to support and work with those communities that face challenges in upgrading their drinking water and waste water infrastructure. WSA is very committed to working with the regulating community and the water and waste water industry throughout Saskatchewan to ensure the safety and reliability of Saskatchewan's water supply.

All levels of government, system owners, and the consumers deserve credit for their time and investment into critical water and waste water infrastructure throughout the province over the past two decades. Since 2007 approximately 1.36 billion has been invested or is being planned for drinking water systems and 1.23 billion on waste water systems. More than 2,100 of these projects are part of the federal, provincial, and municipal infrastructure programs. This is a great example of how different levels of government can effectively work together.

Madam Chair, this concludes my introductory overview of WSA budget request for 2021-22, and I now welcome any comments or questions and look forward to our discussion. Thank you.

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

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Also thank you to Minister Bradshaw for his opening remarks and introduction. I want to thank his officials as well for making themselves available here this evening, and I look forward to hearing your responses to the questions I'll be putting forward this evening.

Just starting with the budget estimates that you've just gone over, I was looking for some clarification on the announcement that was posted on budget day indicating 66 million in operational spending and how that reconciles with the amounts in the Estimates publication that indicated 67.5 million to Water Security. I'm just wondering where that 1.5 million discrepancy resides, or is that a misstatement?

[19:15]

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Sorry about that. We had a technical glitch. Okay, so what we have here is 41.9 from the GFR. Then we have 24.6 from WSA, which comes out to 66.5 total capital. Which in the estimates, it was 27.5 in estimates. So it's 41.9 in capital and 25.6 in operating. So they're actually two different numbers.

Ms. Ritchie: — So just so I understand this. You've got transfers for public service, that's the 25.569. And then transfers . . . Why do you have a capital amount of 41? I don't quite understand.

Mr. France: — Yes, thanks for the questions. Just to clarify, in the estimates the 67.5 is actually just what's transferred from the GRF [General Revenue Fund]. The remaining is from our own source revenue, and as well as essentially our remaining surplus.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. And so when you talk about 66 million in operating capital versus the 67, that was the original question. I don't think I've heard the answer.

Mr. France: — The 67.5, again, that's from . . . So the 66.5 is our total capital. Again, we are able to . . . Sorry, I've screwed that up. My apologies. In the estimates package, it's 67.5, that's our operating budget; 49.19 and then 25.6 is capital. But we have our own source revenue as well as our surplus. So I don't know if I'm clarifying your question for you.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. Well we do have a lot of questions so, you know, maybe in follow-up we could clarify that. I am also wanting some information as to the drop in funding which looks to be about 3 million between last year and this year, and whether or not you did in fact spend the full amount that was allocated. But those are questions I have. But I think it's best, because we've got limited time tonight, that for me to sort of move on to some other questions and if you could follow up with an explanation on that.

I do want to focus on the 66.5 million. I appreciated that itemized list you provided in your introduction, Minister Bradshaw. In terms of the 18.9 million for the phase 1 of the . . . sorry, of initial spending on phase 1, which has been estimated at 500 million, again here, there was an announcement last year of 22.5 million and wondering if that amount is . . . if this 18.9 is a restatement of that initial announcement, or how those two amounts relate,

because that was what was originally announced last summer.

And then, you know, I appreciated also you talked about how some of that initial money is being spent under your prime contractor. And I'm interested in the schedule for that work. Under what time period are we seeing these activities occur?

I did have a look at the environmental assessment website. I see that, you know, nothing's been filed yet with environmental assessment, and just I'm looking for a little bit of an overview in terms of the plan for the consultation on that project. Of course, you know, there's some expectations that there will be First Nation consultation occurring as well as with other stakeholders.

Also you mentioned a number of partners, one of those being SaskBuilds and Agriculture. It did seem like a curious placement of this project within SaskWater. And I'd like to understand a little bit more about the organizational structure within Water Security in terms of how this project is being led within your agency; the role of Legislative Secretary, Lyle Stewart, as that's going forward; and then also some information around some of the bases of estimates for these amounts, because you've talked about 500 million for phase 1 and then some projections in terms of GDP and construction jobs and what refinement there might be on those numbers.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well thank you for that question. Of course, this is something that has been looked at for quite some time. And our Legislative Secretary, Lyle Stewart, has gone out and he's actually consulted with, I think, 45 different stakeholders including First Nations over this past year. And so it's in its infancy at the present time.

The Diefenbaker project is just starting to work towards phase 1. Regina-based Clifton Associates Ltd., they've been selected by an RFP [request for proposal] to begin engineering work to work on the Westside irrigation project. And their work is expected to take 12 to 18 months. It's going to include extensive consultations with First Nations and many other stakeholders. And they're going to do the preliminary engineering design for phases 1 and 2. They're also going to do environmental consulting services and geotechnical soil suitability and geographical mapping.

A careful assessment of potential impacts on environmental protection, downstream users, and communities is going to also be performed. And this also will include consultations with First Nations and other stakeholders as part of the process. We're hoping that this also would be an economic driver for bringing other food-processing industries into the area so we can actually enhance some of the businesses that are operating along the Lake Diefenbaker project.

As with all major capital projects, the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement is going to conduct an analysis of all available funding and procurement models to ensure the best value for the taxpayers. And we're going to be working with the federal Minister of Infrastructure and Communities as well as the Canadian infrastructure bank on additional funding opportunities. And do you want to add anything to that, Kevin?

Mr. France: — Yes, I can add a couple of points to unpack some of the questions. You mention about governance within WSA

and, you know, I think it's a multi-ministry project and we have the support with Agriculture, Highways, SaskBuilds and Procurement, and Trade and Export Development, and Finance.

You also mentioned about engagement. You know, right from the announcement we've been very forward with reaching out and sharing the opportunity with this project, including First Nation communities, rural municipalities, and others that are interested, and explaining the project and the scope. And there's been a lot of great feedback in response to the project itself.

In terms of capital . . . So yes, we have 18.9 for this year. And again that's going towards the work that our prime consultant, Clifton Associates, is doing. And again we're just getting going on that work, and the minister described the work that they're going to accomplish this year.

[19:30]

In terms of last year, we did allocate 22.5. It wasn't spent because we're still in the procurement process as well as COVID and other delays through that process.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. Has a regulatory scan been undertaken at this point in the project cycle? And if so, what regulatory requirements will need to be met and both, sort of, federally and provincially?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well I guess I did state before that, you know, we will be going through all the regulations, everything that has to be done, you know. You know, we take the duty to consult with First Nations very seriously and the Métis. And we also, you know, we're encouraging both the public and private sectors to engage with First Nations and Métis communities early in the development process to ensure all stakeholders have input in the project. And as I said before, we've already met with 45 stakeholders thus far, so we want to make sure that everything is done properly as we move forward with this project. I don't know if that answers your question or not.

Ms. Ritchie: — Well no, not entirely. I think that the most basic part of the question is, has a regulatory scan been undertaken, yes or no? And if so, is that information available? You mentioned 45 stakeholder groups, I assume consulted to date. Can you provide me with a list? You know, I'm looking for some transparency. You know, this is a public works, and you know, I understand of course that some of this information may be available at different points, but how are you going to ensure transparency? And with regards to those two specific items, I'd like to make the request to receive those.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — I guess we were running through . . . Now here's the catch. We're in the very initial stages of this program and, you know, we're going to . . . We only hired Clifton in February. So we're going to follow all the processes we need to follow and that's why we've hired Clifton which is, like I said, this is very early in February. So you know, we're just not even . . . We're not up to speed on that end yet or Clifton wouldn't be.

But what we are going to do is we're going to follow all the environmental assessments that we have to do. And so that's all yet to come. And of course there's lots of . . . There's just so many things in here, and we're in such an early stage at this.

Because there's all the consulting that has to be done, the environmental assessments that have to be done — there's a lot of work that has to be done before we can even get started on this project.

Ms. Ritchie: — Well, Minister Bradshaw, I . . . You know, this is a, as you mentioned, a once-in-a-generation project. It's forecasted to spend \$4 billion. That's a lot of taxpayer dollars. And there are a lot of questions and concerns around this project, and there are expectations for transparency as well.

And I certainly hope that as part of that scope of work that your prime consultant has been issued that, you know, public-facing information is going to be, you know, a key part that certainly . . . what isn't typically provided by proponents. And I assume that as the lead agency on the project that you and the proponent both are the one who's accountable for what your prime consultant is undertaking on your behalf.

And so I certainly hope that those requirements have been stated and certainly that you're also ensuring that you're removing yourself from any kind of conflict of interest you might have as also, you know, part of your mandate is, you know, protecting water quality and as you mentioned in your introduction, a range of regulatory functions and services as they relate to water. And so that also raises some concerns about how you're going to manage those dual roles that are arguably going to be in conflict. And certainly also as part of that assessment, you know, there's been a lot of questions raised around the effect that the project will have on navigable waters that the climate impacts, you know, mitigations for climate change and water flows from the Rockies. And I believe the Ag critic was asking some questions about power, you know, the impacts on the dam on Diefenbaker Lake.

So you know, obviously there's a number of different things that are of concern and, you know, people are concerned that this project might, you know, have some significant environmental impacts. And maybe you could share with us up to this point, how those considerations will be addressed or have been addressed up to this point.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — This is why . . . Like I said, we're in the very early stages. This is why we have hired Clifton Associates, which is a Regina company. So it's nice to know that we have somebody local that's going to be able to understand some, you know, any of the challenges that are out there. So this is something that we're going to have. And absolutely we're going to be as transparent as we can possibly be. Like, I think I've already talked about our duty to consult, our talking to the stakeholders — these are all things that Clifton Associates are going to be doing to help move this project forward and to basically mitigate any environmental challenges that there possibly could be.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. I think in the interest of time, I'm going to move on from that item. There's been a number of local area residents concerned about asbestos in water pipes in Saskatchewan. And it's come to my attention that there are 600 kilometres of asbestos-cement water mains in the capital city of Regina and similar systems to a greater or lesser extent in other communities around the province — Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Weyburn.

[19:45]

And this was an issue that I believe has come up to the ministry in the past and the . . . who I understand to be the former director, executive director with the municipal branch had been aware of some studies undertaken in the United States and by the US [United States] EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] around some of the health risks associated with asbestos pipes. It's also my understanding that in British Columbia, they have adopted the US EPA drinking water guideline for asbestos in water, and there's considerable amount of concern that there isn't, you know, enough attention being placed on this issue given its health risks.

And I'm wondering if you can tell me, what is the current position or status of the Water Security Agency with regards to regulating this substance, understanding its risk profile in the province? And also the prevalence of the asbestos pipes across the province.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — You were talking about the asbestos in the drinking water. Well, Saskatchewan's drinking water standards are based on the guidelines for Canadian drinking water quality, and it's developed through work performed by Health Canada and the federal-provincial-territorial committee on drinking water. That's the CDW [committee on drinking water].

This committee has drinking water and municipal experts from across the country, and the CDW has not established maximum acceptable concentrations nor testing requirements for asbestos in drinking water because there's no scientific issue. This is a nation . . . Canadian drinking water. WSA takes the safety of drinking water very seriously, and we'll continue to follow standards recommended by Health Canada and the CDW to ensure we're following the best science available.

And I do know that . . . I've got one more thing in here and a page back here. Anyway, actually the Conference Board of Canada issued a report showing that Saskatchewan's one of two provinces in the country to receive an A grade for treated waste water . . . I guess we're talking about drinking water though.

We made significant investments on the drinking water part of it. And since 2007, 1.36 billion has been invested or is being planned for the drinking water systems with . . . that's been done since 2007. So we've, you know, we doubled our inspection staff from 8 to 17 in that particular time frame, and all 17 have been and will continue to focus on drinking water and waste water 100 per cent of their time.

So these are things that we have done over the last number years ever since, ever since the problem with the North Battleford water crisis.

Ms. Ritchie: — So there was a report the US EPA conducted in 1980. It was the *Ambient Water Quality Criteria for Asbestos* and it found that asbestos was a known carcinogen when inhaled. It demonstrated the ability of asbestos to induce malignant tumours, and that the passage of ingested fibres through the human gastrointestinal mucosa . . . and the extensive human epidemiological evidence for excess types of cancers were the result of asbestos exposure, and that it was likely to be a human

carcinogen when ingested.

And I'm not sure what accounts for the discrepancy between the *Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality* and, you know, the state of the science that goes back many years. But I would suggest that, you know, there has been at least one jurisdiction in Canada that has decided to take a more precautionary approach. You know, I think sometimes guidelines can lag a little bit.

But would you commit to further investigating the state of the science and the best practice across jurisdictions to ensure that Saskatchewan residents are protected from this health hazard?

Mr. France: — Yes, thank you for the question. So the drinking water committee is aware of the study that you've referenced. And the committee will continue to assess the scientific information and will continue to establish the health guidelines as required. And WSA vice-president does sit on that committee as well and represents Saskatchewan on that committee.

Ms. Ritchie: — Are you referring to the federal-provincial-territorial committee on drinking water? Is that the one of which you refer?

Mr. France: — Correct, yes.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. I guess what I'm asking though is whether or not Water Security would commit to reviewing that science and the jurisdictional scan to, you know, reassess and consider going beyond what's currently the water quality standard.

Mr. France: — Yes. Again, we sit on that committee and there's that commitment to continue to review the science, and WSA being represented on that committee is committed to doing that, yes.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay, thank you for that. And so then in follow-up to that, I would like to request that a follow-up letter or report be provided based on that review or assessment.

[20:00]

A Member: — We will do that.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay, great. Thank you. Moving along in that case . . . You know, you talked about drainage, the agricultural water management strategy in your opening remarks that has been the topic of prior *Hansard*, or not *Hansard* but, you know, committee estimate discussions.

It's regrettable that the committee was not able to meet in 2020 last year. But I have reviewed the minutes going back to the prior two years, you know, so I'm aware of the general framework that the Water Security Agency is working under right now in terms of how it's looking at drainage. But there continues to be a number of concerns and shortcomings with the approach in the eyes of stakeholders, and myself included.

And I'm wondering if you could tell me how many drainage approvals is Water Security Agency currently working on or hopes to bring into compliance in the current year.

Oh, wait a minute. Before you run off, I might as well get all my

questions in at the same time because there's . . . You know, they kind of roll in together. So how many quarters does that involve, and wetlands on those quarters? How many of these projects are required as part of their licence to retain wetlands? What percentage of wetlands there are on these? And how many acres will be drained or retained?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well as far as the Water Security, as you well know and have probably heard, there have been, you know, some problems in the past. But a strategy of the Water Security Agency's new approach . . . It has a new approach to agriculture draining, and that's we want to support our agriculture producers out there, support the economic growth of the province, and by building a sustainable agriculture industry through effective water management that maintains good water quality and safeguards wildlife habitat and approves runoff management in times of flood and drought. The development of an impact mitigation policy is under way and we certainly hope to work on that.

We're going to have to go and consult to find out the numbers, hear the actual numbers.

Ms. Ritchie: — Certainly. I mean if you'd like to follow up afterwards with that specific data, you know, that might allow us to move along to the next question, if I could request that instead.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Okay.

Ms. Ritchie: — So, Minister Bradshaw, you did make reference to the policy on wetlands. You know, we're both aware that that was the subject of a recent audit. And while you say that you're working under a new framework, you know, it's my understanding though that that framework is about six years old already. And so I just want to sort of, you know, review a little bit of what those audit findings were.

So you know, it says that even though the agency informally considers water quality — and I'm paraphrasing here — but that it considers water quality and wetland retention risks, proposed drainage works when reviewing drainage approval applications, the agency has limited policies around wetland retention and water quality.

You know, and just for a little bit of context here, as you recall, I did send your office a letter requesting information about a blue-green algae bloom that was observed in Pasqua Lake this past winter. Yes, I understand that, you know, that raised the level of concern amongst many stakeholders. There was quite a bit of social media stir and sharing of information when that occurred, and based on that I would say that there's, you know, there's broad-based concern regarding the state of water quality and the lack of a policy to guide decision making by the agency that has as part of its mandate that as, you know, one of its core features. It seems quite unacceptable to me the amount of time that it's taken to resolve this issue, both of drainage management and wetland protection.

You know, I note that the original legislation came out I believe . . . or regulations, in 2015. And there's been a lot of sort of, you know, false starts on bringing in a regulatory framework to bring into compliance drainage works, you know. Lots has been done to consult and educate. That gets to be a very constant refrain I

hear from government ministries but, you know, we're again looking for some concrete action.

And you know, I did notice in the annual report you mentioned, you know, you do provide some information there — and I thank you for that — in terms of how many drainage works have been brought into compliance or whether they've, you know, been closed or what have you. But you know, there's still a very large body of outstanding works, and we don't even know how large, if I understand correctly. So you know, the need for this policy is long past due.

I would also say that it also impacts on the irrigation project. You know, it just seems very unusual to me that we can be trying to move forward with these kinds of ambitious projects and yet we still have these kinds of issues on the landscape.

So long preamble, I know, but I would like to understand what progress if any has been made beyond consultation and education towards finalizing the wetland policy, given the level of urgency that there is on that.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Oh, boy. There's a lot there. There was a lot in there. I guess I will go back to, you know, the report on the auditor on the drainage regulations recommendations. And so in '21 we've done a follow-up to review the progress made towards the recommendations and completion and implementation that has happened on two of the recommendations. There's substantial progress on eight of the recommendations and only one recommendation has limited progress.

You know, basically the follow-up audit illustrates that the WSA has continued commitment and done progress toward development and implementation of the agriculture water management strategy to regulate drainage. WSA has delivered on some of the recommendations and made substantial progress on others. WSA will continue to make progress towards full implementation on the remaining recommendations. And I will turn it over to Kevin to go on with the other questions.

Mr. France: — Thank you for your question. And I think you've touched on it as well that, you know, drainage and water management is an issue that WSA has taken very seriously, but it's also an issue that takes a lot of work and collaboration with partners. You referenced 2015, the new strategy. You know, I would note, and you asked previously in terms of targets for approvals, next year's target is over 1,000 quarter sections for approval. But in the last six years, we've been able to get more quarter sections into approval than the previous 20 years.

So I think we've demonstrated successful progress towards working with landowners, working with the environmental community, and finding solutions that work for all parties involved. That includes the work on the wetland policy and mitigation policy. Last year the government announced \$1 million for 11 demonstration projects, which includes wetland retention as one of the demonstration projects. And again we're going to use that information as well as consultation to inform a wetland policy that's going to work for our Saskatchewan producers as well as the environmental community and the stakeholders.

Ms. Ritchie: — Alberta and Manitoba both have wetland policies in place. What is preventing the ministry from taking a similar approach and enacting those policies here in the province? It just seems to me that, you know, there's working policies in neighbouring jurisdictions. This issue has been outstanding for a considerable amount of time, and I think there's a lot of concern on the part of stakeholders that this is taking far longer.

And I do also want to mention that there had been some resolutions brought forward to the Municipalities of Saskatchewan annual convention and meeting this past year signed by I think it was over 100 municipalities.

And you know, it's affecting not just egg producers, but it's affecting many different sectors of the economy and it's impinging on the quality of life for residents. You know, we've had a number of cases of illegal drainage works that have had to, you know, go to a Court of Queen's Bench to get rectified. That was talked about in the 2019 estimates. And anyways I'm just sort of, you know, trying make this point that it's been . . . People are getting impatient. They would like to see resolution to this issue so that things, you know, decision making can move forward.

And I think particularly when you think about the kinds of projects that are coming forward that need policy frameworks in place to enable them to go forward, like the irrigation project, that you know, the time for consultation and awareness is over and we need to see something in place. So I guess I would ask, you know, what is the timeline for finalizing and bringing in a wetland policy?

[20:15]

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — There was a multitude of questions throughout there, so I'm going to try and answer them as best that I can.

You know, to begin with, you talk about Manitoba and Alberta. Well Saskatchewan has more cropland than Alberta and Manitoba combined and close to half of Canada's irrigable acres. The development of the made-in-Saskatchewan water management strategy is key to our future as we grow our agriculture sector.

You know, our initiative is we're going to support Saskatchewan by protecting the investment of farmers and ranchers and their operations, protect the investment in local infrastructure from flooding impacts, continue to support our producers' access to markets and opportunities to grow international markets for their products, and, also supporting a delivery of Saskatchewan's *Prairie Resilience: A Made-in-Saskatchewan Climate Change Strategy*.

This is the first time in three and a half decades any provincial government has reviewed the impacts of agriculture water management. And we're going to be working with the ministers of Agriculture and Environment and other stakeholders to get it right, and to get it right for the residents of Saskatchewan.

And I'll just read back to you, I mean, you've mentioned that SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] had

put this in. And this is a letter that we replied to SARM with Rodger Hayward, the new president of . . . or excuse me, SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association], the new president of SUMA. And we thanked him for the letter containing the details of the 2021 resolution pertinent to the activities managed by the Water Security Agency:

And I'm pleased to provide the following responses. 2021-3 we're monitoring water quality on lakes and rivers. We're pleased to respond to your organization's resolution advocating the monitoring of water quality on lakes and rivers having compared the results of the Saskatchewan surface water quality objectives as published online in the quarterly report. WSA acknowledges the value of monitoring water resources to protect and ensure water quality and ecosystems to support safe and sustainable source water for the purpose of agriculture, public health, and recreation. WSA wishes to evaluate your report of quarterly reporting to see if it would add value and transparency to water quality reporting. Glen McMaster, director of water quality and habitat assessment services, will contact you later this spring about this.

So we will be contacting them. And here we go to the development of a wetland policy for Saskatchewan:

Saskatchewan has more cropland than Alberta and Manitoba combined and half of Canada's irrigable acres. Agriculture water management is a major component in development of Saskatchewan's wetland policy. WSA has been working hard to develop and implement the agriculture water management strategy and the associated policies and procedures. This is the first time in three and a half decades any provincial government has reviewed agriculture water management across the province. WSA is working with producers and partner agencies, including the Minister of Agriculture and Environment for the made-in-Saskatchewan approach to wetlands.

And last year, I guess we already talked about this, where the Water Security Agency invested \$1 million for 10 stakeholder organizations and 11 different agriculture demonstration projects.

So basically what we have done is we've been answering to SUMA, and we will use the information to work on this policy. And we're not going to rush into this because we want to make sure and get it right, like it hasn't been done for a long time. Kevin, do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. France: — Yes and thanks, Minister, and thanks for the question. I think just on the 11 projects and just reference that we're going to use that information. They're currently active into this fiscal as well, and some of partner agencies include Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, Saskatchewan Research Council, and others. And these demonstration projects again are looking at important attributes to a mitigation policy which will help inform that policy going forward.

You mentioned Alberta and Manitoba have policies, and we are obviously aware of that. But I think what we have heard and what we understand is both in Alberta and Manitoba there isn't broad uptake of those policies, and in fact there's some compliance

challenges with those policies.

So you know, in our conversations with stakeholders through the engagement, it was made perfectly clear that we need to ensure that we get this right and make sure we find a solution that's going to work for the environmental community, our agricultural producers, our rural communities, and municipal communities so that the mitigation policy again works for all residents in Saskatchewan.

Ms. Ritchie: — Well a couple things in response to that. You know, I'm a little bit dissatisfied. And you know, I still have some questions because it would seem to me that, you know, given that we do have more arable land and agricultural production than Alberta and Manitoba combined that, you know, that we would be leaders not laggards on a wetland policy.

And you know, you talk about wanting to get it right. I would submit though that, you know, this has been six years in the making since you came out with your strategy. So you know, it's again an area where, you know, I said already people are really getting impatient. They're getting increasingly concerned. And you know, I guess I'm just not really understanding what the holdup is. I mean, how much consulting does one need to do to understand the issues?

I mean, I know we all agree that, you know, the ag sector is an important one, a vitally important one here in Saskatchewan. I mean, absolutely no doubt. But you know, there are some competing interests here. There are other interests, and not even that, I mean like there's interests, you know, from farm to farm. You know, acres are getting flooded because of upstream drainage, unregulated works.

And then furthermore, you know, stakeholders tell me about their concerns with environmental sustainability governance and, you know, how this issue is also ultimately affecting our trade, our export and trade issues as well. There are purchasers that, you know, they look at our performance when it comes to environmental management, and you know, this is an issue that's getting in the way of trade.

So you know, you talk about economic drivers for the policy and it's, you know, affecting our ability to be competitive on the international stage. I mean of course I personally don't see that as the only issue; I am also the critic for Environment after all. And it is your mandate to protect, you know, water quality and address things with surface water, agricultural drainage and so forth.

So you know, it's solidly within your mandate to find a way through this. And I guess I just find it unacceptable that it's taking this long to resolve. And I hope to see . . . And you haven't, I guess, you haven't even answered my question. I asked for a timeline and, you know, I haven't received a response to that. And so maybe do you want an opportunity to respond to that piece specifically? Is there a timeline? Yes or no.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — The timeline is that we are going to work and get this policy right. That's the timeline. And so we want to make sure that we get this policy right.

Ms. Ritchie: — Right. Okay. Well that's a disappointing

response, not what I was hoping for. And it seems to become a common refrain, so I'll leave it at that. And in the interest of time that's on the clock — I mean, we have a timeline, right? — I'll move on to my next question.

This is in regards to the Lower Qu'Appelle water quality study that was done in 2016. There was an assessment of sources of nutrients to the Qu'Appelle River system that found on average 91 per cent of phosphorous and 51 per cent of nitrogen was coming from non-point sources — so not from cities and towns. And then a follow-up study was done that found that there had been some small reductions for nutrients by better cattle and fertilizer management.

And what I'm wondering is, does the Water Security Agency continue to license drainage into this river system from this watershed. And if so, how is nutrient loading being mitigated for in Water Security approvals?

[20:30]

I think this, you know, relates to the matter that I had mentioned previously, very concerning levels of blue-green algae blooms in Pasqua Lake this past winter. And I would note that in the response that was provided when there was the request made is that, you know, there was no mention in that response about either . . . I think it talked about ag runoff, but you know, it didn't really speak to what mitigation or actions were being taken to address this very troubling development. So the original question, just to go back and restate it is, what is being done with the licence for drainage into this river system from the watershed to address nutrient loading?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes. Well the water quality standards in the Qu'Appelle Valley lakes, it's a long-standing issue and historically the lake has experienced high natural levels of nutrients that predate settlement in the regions. The Water Security Agency focused on the city of Regina to upgrade its sewage treatment plants to meet stringent quality standards, and there's not been a sewage bypass issue since 2015. The city of Moose Jaw and the towns of Lumsden and Lebreton are also making improvements to their waste water treatment systems and collectively this work will improve downstream water quality over time.

Flooding and sewage bypasses has been . . . and with the summer rainfalls of 2014 and '15 have heightened interest in the Qu'Appelle lakes' water quality. And the First Nations near Pasqua Lake have previously indicated that water quality is a high-priority issue.

And E. coli levels due to material entering the lakes from local sources near the lakeshores and the Qu'Appelle lakes were recorded in 2014 and '15, but following major rain events. While sewage bypasses in Regina were blamed, the analysis of the rate of flow on the Qu'Appelle River show sewage bypasses from Regina couldn't have reached the lakes in the time of sampling. But the water quality monitoring of these flood events show E. coli levels had returned to normal before that happened.

Anyway and when you go back to the blue-green algae, I've got a note on that here too. Just take me two seconds here to find it. Okay yes. We looked into the cause of that. Actually as soon as

we were notified on it, we looked into it and the WSA has looked into the cause of the blue colour to determine it's a biological product of blue and green algae bloom that was likely due to warm fall water that froze over the winter. It's expected to naturally decay when the winter ice melts. And we've reached out to the First Nations and stakeholders and briefed them on the investigations. And I can actually give you a complete listing of all the investigations or all the timelines that were done if you wanted but if it . . .

Ms. Ritchie: — In fact, Minister Bradshaw, I did want to also request that the previous letter that you referenced regarding the response to SUMA as well, going back to the previous question. You had quoted from the letter response to SUMA.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, Rodger Hayward.

Ms. Ritchie: — Can we have that tabled please as well? A copy of that please.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — I can't see any reason why you couldn't. Just looking for the timelines here, I have all of the timelines listed in one of my papers.

Mr. France: — Yes, so we'll table that letter to SUMA. And I'll, just maybe while you're looking for that, Minister, just to reference Water Security Agency and our water quality monitoring efforts. We monitor the water quality of rivers and lakes across south and central Saskatchewan. The monitoring provides information to help understand the status of water quality in the Qu'Appelle River system including reductions in nutrient loading resulting from recent waste water treatment plant upgrades by municipalities.

I'll also reference our Ag water management strategy as well. And the three important elements of that strategy do focus on water quality, quantity, and wildlife habitat while also understanding balancing the needs of producers, and as you mentioned earlier, the prosperity of that land too.

So did you find what you were looking for, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — I was just going back. I've got the timelines here of everything, timelines of . . . Well this was the timelines of the contact of the File Hills Tribal Council. Would you like that?

Ms. Ritchie: — That would be great, thank you.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Okay. On March the 11th, 2021 . . .

Ms. Ritchie: — Oh, I'm sorry. I meant, I thought you meant you were going to, sort of, table the . . .

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, I'll get to that. I was just going to get the timelines here. I was just looking through the book to find that other letter. But okay, on March 11th of 2021, WSA first became aware of the blue water through phone calls from the public and social media posts.

On March the 12th of '21, WSA sent out staff to collect samples and understand what this may be. A general investigation of samples were done. Samples were then sent to the provincial lab

and the lab operated by Peter Leavitt, director of the Institute of Environmental Change and Society at the University of Regina. Also on March 12th, Chief Peigan from the Pasqua First Nation discussed the issue with WSA ecologist Dr. Heather Haig and talked about the sampling and plans for an analysis.

March 15th, Dr. Haig followed up with Chief — I don't know if I'm saying this right — Peigan. Is that the way you say it?

A Member: — Peigan, yes.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Peigan. Prior to the WSA issuing a public release on the issue indicating that preliminary analysis would likely be ready on March 19th, 2021 and WSA would try to organize a conference call then to discuss. Also on March 15th, WSA emailed File Hills Tribal Council prior to any public release to ask for discussion about the issue. March 15th at the end of the day, WSA issues a public release and indicates samples have been taken and the analysis is being done in conjunction with the lab operated by Peter Leavitt, director of the Institute of Environmental Change and Society at the University of Regina.

March 16th, Bailey Watson, community relations and special projects with the File Hills Tribal Council called WSA in a follow up to the email sent March 15th, 2021. WSA indicates they are interested in sharing the sampling and preliminary analysis once it is done. March 16th, Bailey Watson, community relations and special projects with the File Hills Tribal Council sent an email to all the File Hills Tribal Council chiefs inviting them to call on Friday when the results are expected to be in. Dr. Haig would be in attendance to answer questions.

March 18th, I received your letter outlining your request for information on this issue. And March 18th, WSA follows up about sharing the results of the preliminary analysis and is told Shannon Thomson, director of land and resources, File Hills Tribal Council, is now the contact. Also on March 18th, WSA's Dr. Heather Haig speaks with Shannon Thomson, director of land and resources, File Hills Tribal Council, and verbally shares the preliminary analysis, followed up with an email containing the preliminary report on the analysis. And also on March 18th, Shannon Thomson indicates the File Hills Tribal Council will wait for written correspondence and does not respond to the request for a 30-minute verbal meeting and opportunity to question Dr. Haig.

March 19th . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I'm just about done. I'm right at the end here. March 19th, WA issued a public release outlining the preliminary analysis and findings.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. All right. Thank you, Minister Bradshaw, and thank you for your letter to me in response to my request for information on that incident. I mean, what you've just shared with me really is how you reacted to an event that occurred in Pasqua Lake. And I appreciate the actions that you took.

However, my question — and I'll just state it again — is, you know, are you continuing to license drainage into this watershed, knowing the level of nutrient loading that already occurs?

I mean, you seem to have exceeded some water quality guidelines here, and we're looking for prevention and mitigation

at this point. So if you could please tell me, you know, what mitigating steps are being undertaken with respect to drainage licences into this watershed?

[20:45]

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes, we continued to license drainage under our approved process. And I'd like to mention that, you know, our ag producers are very good stewards of the land. Coming from an agriculture background myself, there is nothing we would do to destroy any of our processes out there, because that's our living. So I believe in the ag producers and we will continue to do our, under our approved plan, our licensed ones that are already there. And Kevin, do you want to add something to that?

Mr. France: — Yes, sure, and thank you for your question. I'll just reference the fact that we are working in this area, working with producers, municipalities, and other stakeholders to really advance the network approvals approach which includes the appropriate full controls. And there's lots of examples within the lower Qu'Appelle, Qu'Appelle chain that involve our conservation and development districts, partners, and other project partners. That area, through our risk assessment and watersheds, allows us to identify the appropriate measures to ensure again those three metrics of water quality, quantity, and wildlife habitat.

And to build off of the minister's comments about our agriculture producers, you know, I think sustainability is top of mind for our producers throughout this province and they've adopted strategies such as 4R [right source at right rate, right time, right place] management, zero-till, that all benefit both the environment as well as bottom line.

And then lastly just on the lower Qu'Appelle chain, I think one of the really important elements to that and understanding of that system is, naturally pre-settlement was always eutrophic or nutrient high. And as such, you know, the non-point sources that you referenced may include agriculture, but also other natural vegetation and so on that contributes those phosphorus and nitrogen levels to the system.

Ms. Ritchie: — And is there a clear understanding of the proportions of those sort of baseline natural sources and agricultural?

Mr. France: — There is research out there that, I mean, non-point is obviously very difficult to identify that source with markers, but there is ongoing research. And we are working in that area with researchers to identify and understand nutrient contributions from the environment as well as agriculture.

Ms. Ritchie: — Back in 2018 there were 12 sections of new illegal drainage works in the Quill lakes watershed reported to the Water Security Agency in the legislative committee. And Water Security has stated since that . . . since 2016 that drainage into the Quill lakes will not be permitted because there's not adequate outlet and the only option is consolidation or ditch closure. So I believe that was in the Wadena area. I'm wondering if you can tell me if any of these illegal drains has been closed or consolidated at this point, and if not, why? What happened in the last four years?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Okay, the request for assistance, RFA, process is intended to resolve complaints regarding unapproved drainage that involve directly affected parties — the petitioner and the respondent. All FRAs received are reviewed, investigated, and responded to if the parties are directly affected.

Water Security has received no RFAs regarding the works in question, and the agency is not pursuing compliance of these files at this time. This information will be retained for future consideration if an RFA is received involving the lands in question. The agriculture water management strategy is currently focused on building awareness, support among landowners, rural municipalities, and key stakeholders towards the achievement of increasing numbers of drainage approvals and quarter sections in compliance. The Water Security Agency is aware of substantial areas of unapproved drainage, approximately 150,000 quarter sections, and the agency recognizes it will take time to achieve province-wide compliance. Significant progress has been demonstrated since the strategy implementation in 2016.

Ms. Ritchie: — All right, so that was in the Minutes or the *Debates* posted on May 7th, 2019, Standing Committee on the Environment. Well I think it was the previous year, but last year, in 2019, Ms. Sproule had also reported these six quarters in Wadena. And at that point it was indicated that, I think, there was some talk about the process and some conversations. And so I'm just reviewing the notes here, but it looks as though that didn't go anywhere. I find that a little bit surprising. It's my understanding that there had been, you know, some work with track hoes and other equipment on the side of the road. And perhaps I can do some further follow-up and get back to you on that, because there seems to be a disconnect here between the information in the Minutes and what you're saying. So I'll leave it at that for now.

I did want to go to a few other questions related. I mean obviously we're talking about the Quill lakes watershed, and that's something that has also been another longstanding issue. And there was a report by KGS that identified that drainage closures would reduce inflows into the Quill lakes by 38 per cent, and it identified over 88,000 acres of illegally drained wetlands at that time.

So I guess what I would ask is, how many of those acres have been brought into compliance as of today, either closed or consolidated? And some follow-ons to that in terms of how much money has been spent to address drainage and water flooding at the Quill lakes. How many requests for assistance have been received for this watershed? And of those, how many were closed or consolidated? And for those that were withdrawn, I'd like to know if there's been any investigations that were done regarding these illegal drainage structures. And I'll leave it at that for now.

[21:00]

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — You know, unfortunately what you've asked for doesn't fit into our '21-22 estimates so we actually, we don't have that information. So you know, it just doesn't fit in there, so we don't have that information.

Ms. Ritchie: — Is it possible for me to receive a response later then?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — That would take a lot of digging to try and find all of that out. Maybe Kevin can tell you what's being done.

Mr. France: — Yes, just in reference to the Quill lakes and the Quill Lakes Watershed Association, WSA has been working closely with the Watershed Association. And understanding . . . I mean the good news, I guess, in the area is Quill lakes itself is receding. You know, it's not substantial, but it is receding. And some of those lost acres have been recovered and they're actually farmable now.

But we're working with the Watershed Association to find, you know, options such as water storage and using that water storage for irrigation purposes with the farming community in that area. So we're excited with our working relationship with the Watershed Association to find solutions that are going to work in that area and with the producers and citizens in that area.

Ms. Ritchie: — Has there been flood mapping undertaken in this area? Presumably that would have been part of the 2016 KGS report, would it not? I'm just a little surprised that the information I'm requesting wouldn't be readily available in terms of, you know, the number of illegal drainage works that were identified in that study and be able to cross-reference how many of those have actually been brought into compliance. It seems like a fairly straightforward question.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — You know, I think that's something we'll have to get back to you with because we just don't know that and we don't have that here.

Ms. Ritchie: — Well I would appreciate if you could endeavour to locate that information. And there was, you know, a second part to that question regarding the amount of money that's been spent working on addressing drainage. And again I'm sure that those are amounts that you will have access to. And I apologize, I mean, you've probably reported on this in previous committees. I really don't know. But I just would like to get a current tally.

Mr. France: — Thanks for the question. And to clarify, you're asking about in that area of Quill lakes specifically or the province?

Ms. Ritchie: — Quill lakes.

Mr. France: — I don't think we break down by watershed in terms of, you know, operational costs spent in that area. I can speak to a high level in terms of our allocated budget, operational budget for the ag water management area, which would obviously work within Quill lakes and throughout the province. But we don't break it down specific to a region or a watershed.

Ms. Ritchie: — Well then I guess whatever way you do break it down, if I could receive that information. I want to go back to the annual report at this point. And you know, dam safety was an issue that became sort of raised in profile a number of years ago after there had been some, you know, very serious failures in British Columbia and South America.

And I note that in your report, you've provided a graph indicating a risk ratio and risk index for the period of 2010-2011 to '19-20. You changed your reporting framework . . . or risk index to one

that is defined as individual structure's relative failure probability multiplied by relative consequence rating. And then you've taken a total portfolio risk index and you've summed it into this portfolio number.

And so I'm a little bit concerned of the lack of transparency with that reporting and I would like to request disaggregated data on the . . . How many is it here? Is it six structures? I know I saw the number here at some point. Maybe you could just confirm for me. You've indicated that you've got a portfolio risk assessment. It's for a certain number, and I thought it was listed but I've lost track. And could we have that broken down please?

[21:15]

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — I guess we got a little bit of a problem here. We were talking out there with obviously the different people . . . Can you clarify exactly which structures you're referring to in your question?

Ms. Ritchie: — Yes, and my apologies, Mr. Bradshaw. I think I got my wires crossed on that one. I was taking another look at the information, and it is from your annual report where you're talking about structures that you as an agency operate. So I will just make that clarification. And so, you know, it was really referencing the . . . You've reported on a risk ratio and index for the portfolio of dams that Water Security Agency operates. And what I was asking for was a disaggregated list, you know, so rather than everything rolled up into one, what is the risk ranking for each of those dams? If that information exists and you can provide that to me after the meeting, I would appreciate that. Is that clear now?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — I guess I question when you . . . Well first you said you thought there was six and you thought there was six there, but I didn't quite know what you were getting at. Was it six dams?

Ms. Ritchie: — No. This is your performance measure. It's listed on pages 8 and 9 of your annual report. You talk about the total portfolio risk is the sum of the individual structures. And so given that it is a sum of individual structures, I would like to see the numbers for those individual structures.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — For all of the dams in the province?

Ms. Ritchie: — Just the ones that you operate.

Mr. France: — We don't have that information obviously here tonight, and we'd have to get back to you with that information.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. Yes, that's great. Thank you very much. So a few more questions in the short time remaining. It's my understanding that the funding for watershed . . . And I'm unclear about this. I don't know if it's the watershed associations, but there's been some funding cut in your recent budget that was going to watershed associations, I understand. If you could please clarify whether that indeed is the case. And I would like to understand better what agencies are affected and the reason for that funding cut.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — There was a funding cut, but that was from Agriculture; that was not from us. We did not cut any

funding for the watershed.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. Does Water Security Agency fund WUQWATR [Wascana & Upper Qu'Appelle Watersheds Association Taking Responsibility]? Yes? Okay. Yes, that's the acronym for one of them. I mean, I was a little bit unclear — and no fault of your own, I suppose — but you know, you have a number of different associations. You've got your watershed stewardship groups; then you've got your conservation and development area authorities; and then the watershed associations.

And I'm a little bit unclear in terms of how each of these agencies . . . you know, what function they perform or how they're interrelated, which ones get funding, if there's any . . . And maybe the only question in the interest of time is, you know, has there been any change to that framework of late? And if so, what has that been?

Mr. France: — Yes, thank you for the question. You asked about the different essentially bodies out there that work within watershed management. And so we have watershed authorities, conservation and development associations, and then watershed stewardship groups. Those are the three different groups that WSA works with.

Watershed associations essentially are made up of the watershed, and that includes municipalities, RMs [rural municipality], and in some cases irrigation districts. And they are an other legislated entity, that being they can actually levy and gather tax dollars to construct works, drainage works such as drainage ditches or conveyance channels.

And then we have the conservation and development authorities, and again they're usually within the watershed. And so you have the overarching watershed and then within that more of a regional scale, you have your conservation and development — C & Ds are what we use for the acronyms — and again, they're predominantly RMs, producers. And they again levy dollars from producers in an area so that they can work on projects such as drainage projects and other water conveyance.

And then the watershed stewardship groups. Again, they came from the North Battleford report, and WSA continues to provide funding to those watershed stewardship groups annually and work with them. And there's a body association, SAW, the Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds, and we also work closely with them.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — The C & Ds . . . and of course I know about them because we actually have, by our farm, we've actually got two different C & D ditches. And what they do is the municipality will put a rate on your land to facilitate paying for that drainage.

Ms. Ritchie: — Okay. It's surprising to me how many, you know, different organizational bodies seem to be working at a number of different levels and for different agencies, you know, or different ministries, rather. It must be quite a cumbersome job to . . . I'm just thinking of the, you know, the level of effort it must require on these various boards to be engaged on all these different fronts. But I do appreciate that explanation.

And is there any relation to the . . . How does that relate to the organizations that function at the sort of stakeholder level on the ag side? Like there must be some overlap there.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Well of course water is very important to the ag end of it, whether it . . . In the area I come from, which is up in the Northeast, it's more the drainage end. And of course as you get into the South, you're looking at the irrigation end of it. So it's a very important aspect in the agriculture end as to how everything works. And for a very good example, the million and a half we're putting into clearing the channel, it's going to be very well accepted up in our area because we do have some drainage places that are, you know, they're starting to get overgrown. Like I mean they've been there for years and so they're starting to get overgrown. So we've increased the funding on that end of it. You know, of course, all the environmental studies were already done on these particular areas.

So this is something that, like I said, it's very important to agriculture. Water, whether it be in irrigating, whether it be in flooding, water is something that is very critical. And it's been long said, up in our area anyway, that there's been more black eyes caused over people draining water onto somebody else's land than anything else. I guess that's kind of just a little bit of a rant on the agriculture end of it.

Ms. Ritchie: — Well hopefully with the establishment of a wetland policy, we can avoid some black eyes going forward.

The Water Appeal Board . . . I asked this question in Environment committee and they referred me to you folks. It was noted in that, the Water Appeal Board regulations had been repealed and the explanation given to me last night was that that function had been rolled into an administrative capacity within your agency. So I'm looking for an explanation as to why that route was taken. I think that the appeal board was there for the purpose of a dispute, you know, anytime that there was a dispute with a licence decision and the need for that to be sort of arm's-length. So why the change? How is that being administered going forward?

Mr. France: — Thank you for the question. So the Water Appeal Board's previous role was to give landowners the ability to appeal a decision of the Water Security Agency that was not a result of their complaint process. And so the Water Appeal Board focused on a portion of land in the dispute between landowners rather than dealing with the larger water management issues, rather than just the one quarter section to another.

And so in 2015, as you referenced, the Water Security Agency announced the ag water management strategy and the accompanying regulations, which clarified the drainage approvals and streamlined the process. And you know, previously under the Water Appeal Board it took several years to complete a lot of the complaint-based process, and now with the RFA or the request for assistance process raised by a complainant, that process now allows us to actually deal with those drainage complaints and work with the proponents on the case itself.

Ms. Ritchie: — And so in the event that a landowner has an issue with a determination coming out of this new process, you know, what is their recourse? Is there any?

Mr. France: — In terms of if they were not satisfied with the outcomes of it? Again, that the complaint basis . . . So it's filed, we do our due diligence, we go out and investigate the merits of the complaint, work with both parties. And what we strive to do is to reach, you know, if there is drainage, to reach approvals and mutually beneficial outcomes for both parties. If we are unable to meet that, we do obviously proceed with order closures and those type of measures in the cases where there is an inability to move those drainage works into compliance.

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — I think I can add a little bit to that too. We have changed direction there a bit. Like the CEO, Shawn Jaques, he comes from an agriculture background so has a very good understanding of some of the problems or some of the complaints that do come up on the ag end.

Ms. Ritchie: — Well it looks to me like we're just about out of time, so I'll maybe leave my questions at that for tonight.

The Chair: — Thank you. Go ahead.

[21:30]

Mr. France: — Thank you. I just want to clarify, I think it was the first question that you asked and I just want to clarify that question. And so it was on the 66.5 million versus the 67.5 million we discussed again at the beginning. So the 67.5 referred to in the Estimates book, it represents the transfers in total that WSA receives from the General Revenue Fund. So that is broken into 41.9 million for capital transfers, plus 25.6 million for operating expenses. So operating expenses are day-to-day expenses, and for staff and operations, again, that total that's 67.5 million that you referenced. The 66.5 million referred to in the news release date of April 8th is our total capital budget. So that is funded by the 41.9 million from the GRF that you see in the Estimates book and that I just referred to. Plus WSA will fund an additional 24.6 from its reserves, which totals up to the 66.5 capital budget.

So the two numbers, although very close in amount, really represent two different things. One represents our total funding from the GRF, and one is our total capital budget.

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you for that.

The Chair: — All right, having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of business this evening, we will adjourn consideration of the estimates for the Water Security Agency. Minister, if you have any closing remarks you'd like to make?

Hon. Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes. I want to certainly thank the opposition for all of the questions that she brought out, very thoughtful questions, and I hope that we answered them properly for her. And I guess we do have one document to table to get back to her. I want to thank all the other committee members tonight and of course all of the various people I have from the Water Security Agency helping me out and my chief of staff, Angela. I also want to thank Hansard for all the work they do and have been doing. We put in a lot of long nights and everything else and weekends also, so I want to thank Hansard for all the work that they are doing here. And thank you, Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Ms. Ritchie, if you have any

closing remarks you'd like to make?

Ms. Ritchie: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Also I'd like to extend my thanks to the committee and the Chair, the staff that's been assisting us through the meeting, yourself, Minister Bradshaw and your officials both here and assisting virtually. I appreciate you offering to get back to me with some of that information that I have already requested and all of the responses to my questions. Thank you.

The Chair: — All right. That concludes our business this evening and I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Steele so moves. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee now stands adjourned until Friday, April 30th, 2021 at 3 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 21:32.]