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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 7 MAY 2010

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker (Biggar): The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Lobster prices (further)

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My first question today is to the minister of fisheries. Fishers on PEI have started off their season and they're getting their first cheque this week for their lobster catches. Minister, they are getting paid a low price of \$2.75 a pound for canners and \$3.25 for market. Minister, this is the lowest price, and it's even lower than last year where it started out.

Why, minister, do lobster prices continue to sink under your government?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, some fisherman have gotten, or are getting paid, and I've heard some prices in the range of \$3 to \$3.25.

So the price is anywhere from to \$2.75 to, probably, \$3.25 for canners. So it's all over the place right yet. It'll be a while before it settles down and we know the exact price that the industry is going to be paying.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: To the same minister, Madam

You were down to Boston's seafood show, you came back, you were very excited about the opportunities for our fishermen and the prices that they were going to get for the lobster. Minister, did you mislead the fishermen when you came back, telling them that they're going to get a high price when, in actual fact, they're not?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: No, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: That's a good answer. No. Madam Speaker, to the same minister.

Minister, the MLA from Belfast came back from the show saying that markets were wide open, no glut of lobsters, everything was looking good. We were going to get better prices. Why are he and the rest of our fishermen on PEI getting so lowly underpaid for their catches?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, we have to realize that our industry has to go and sell their product across not only Canada and the United States, but in the world.

There's been a recession, if you haven't noticed, in the last couple years, and things are tough out there. There is a certain price point that product will sell for. There is a

demand for our product. It's the best product in the world. Why wouldn't there be a demand? But at the same time, there is a point where it will sell. Processors, buyers, sellers, look at the point at which it will sell and they have to set their price at that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Minister, have you spoken with the seafood processors industry to find out what's going on?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Yes, Madam Speaker.

We speak quite a bit with the seafood processors' association, with the PEIFA, with all members of the industry, on a regular basis. We have the lobster roundtable which we created just so we could do that and it has been working very well. I mean, all members of the industry are around the table and discussing things, but we haven't come to a point yet where we can actually fix things - get to one sentence that will fix the problem. We have an issue with the world markets and that's the way it is.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: I guess I would say that the roundtable may not be working too well if we're getting the lowest prices in the history of our lobster fishermen here right now in

the last number of years.

Minister, have you interjected on behalf of the fishermen to talk to these seafood processors to get a better price for them? Have you come to the plate for them?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, we work with all sectors of the industry and certainly we've been talking with the processors and trying to get the best price we can possibly get.

Like I said before, we have two co-ops on Prince Edward Island owned by fishermen. Do you think that they'd be fishing and paying themselves a lower price if they could get a bigger price? I mean, it's just ridiculous to think that. So they're basically getting the price that the market will pay right now.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Priest Pond bridge

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My first question today is to the minister of transportation and public works.

Minister, I understand that on Monday the Priest Pond Bridge is going to be under construction. Closure of the bridge is going to have a serious impact on the fishing

industry in that area, and also tourism. My question: Will you consider, on behalf of these residents, putting the work off until September rather than in the peak of both of their seasons?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. MacKinley: Madam Speaker, could you get her to repeat the question? I couldn't hear it.

Speaker: Of course.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Bagnall: Wasn't paying attention.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the minister. On Monday you have construction of the Priest Pond Bridge. As you know, it's in the peak of our lobster season and the start of our tourism season. The residents have asked us would we ask you to see if you would consider moving the work until the fall rather than now.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. MacKinley: Very good question, and I'm also getting the same question from Kellys Cross-Cumberland. I've also got the questions up west.

But when we're building these bridges, we have a very short window to build them. I'd love to be building them in the winter but we can't build them in the winter. The thing

is we've only got so many contractors that can build these bridges. With the stimulus funds that's across Canada, it's doubtful that somebody'll come in from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and bid on these jobs.

So with a very limited amount of people to build, we have a schedule and we have to follow the schedule. But guess what? The bridge will be safe. The reason we're taking that bridge and fixing, it's not safe. Heavy equipment could go through it, school buses could go through it. But, guess what? After we're done fixing it - and it's going to be an inconvenience, short - what is it?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Ms. Bertram: Short-term pain for long-term gain.

Mr. MacKinley: No. Short pain for long-term gain.

Basically, you'll have a good bridge to travel back and forth for the rest of your days.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Rural Action Plan

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the minister of rural development.

The government released it's so-called Rural Action Plan in January, finally. People in

PEI were waiting well over two and a half years for this. Many people call it the rural inaction plan. My question to the rural development minister: Minister, the day your government announced your inaction plan, you started to tie in every dollar spent on PEI to the rural inaction plan. Why are you trying to disguise normal infrastructure, upgrading, and program development as something entirely new? Please answer the question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: I don't know anything about the rural inaction plan, but the Rural Action Plan is tied -

Premier Ghiz: That's the federal plan.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. LeClair: That's exactly what I was going to say. It seems like she's talking about some federal plan where every time there's an issue or someone looking for funding, they say: We gave that money to Prince Edward Island, go and look to them to see if they can do it. When it's actually Prince Edward Island money that's putting money into all of these programs and initiatives.

But our Rural Action Plan is definitely working. It has been initiated to get all sectors of government working together and that's what it's doing.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Mister Minister, there's been an economic development fund in the province for years. When you came into government you renamed it the Island Community Fund. Guess what, minister? The day you released your inaction plan, every dollar from the Island Community Fund was all of a sudden part of the rural inaction plan.

Minister, why are you trying to mislead Islanders into thinking that these are new funds?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: I'm glad you asked that because the Island Community Fund is Island money. It's a fund that we put together as the Government of Prince Edward Island to build up rural communities and communities all across Prince Edward Island, urban and rural.

Definitely that fund is doing that. We're working hard in those areas and it's working very well, and we're very proud of it. The only problem I have is when the federal people or personnel or ministers say: Go to the Island, we gave them the money. That's not the case whatsoever.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: The same question to the minister of rural development for Prince Edward Island.

Minister, in your press releases you've described standard building maintenance to a Lion's Club or installing a new slide and swing set in a school as part of your rural inaction plan. Minister, this is everyday upkeep, or maintenance. It should be done routinely. My question to you is -

Some Hon. Members: Shame, shame!

Leader of the Opposition: - why are you trying to mislead Islanders by pretending that this is part of a new rural inaction plan?

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. I didn't get the last part of that question.

Speaker: I don't think we could hear so could you just kind of repeat that again?

And maybe we could just wait for the question, members.

Leader of the Opposition: Sure, Madam Speaker.

What we're referring to is the government's rural inaction plan. We're talking about how government continues to mislead the public when they talk about new spending.

My question to the minister. In a press release, you described standard building maintenance to a Lions Club or installing a new slide and swing set at a school as part of your rural inaction plan. I mean, this is great work but it's really maintenance. My

question to the minister is: Why are you trying to mislead Islanders by pretending it's part of your new rural inaction plan?

Ms. Bertram: Georgetown (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, what she's speaking about is these are rural communities, these are public entities.

A lot of them are volunteer - most - they're all volunteer organizations, actually, the Lions Club in those areas. They have issues keeping their facilities up, upgrading their facilities. What's wrong with bringing playground equipment in so children can play?

You talked last night an hour about recreation and how recreation's good for rural PEI and for all Islanders. Why wouldn't we want to use our funds to help communities upgrade their facilities?

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

For years Lions Clubs and community groups have applied for and received maintenance dollars. That money's been there forever. But we used to have a million-dollar hog industry in this province in 2007. People used to be able to have lots of jobs. In this rural inaction plan, my question to the minister is: Why does he keep misleading people on spending of new

money supposedly to create economic development across the province?

Answer the question please, Mr. Minister.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, since we came into power we've put in millions of dollars across Prince Edward Island in all our departments.

It all goes towards - we've done more for rural development on PEI in two and a half years than you fellows did since you came to power.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. LeClair: Every area of rural PEI has been touched by our government.

Speaker: Sorry, sorry.

Mr. LeClair: I'm not -

Speaker: Go ahead, minister. I'm sorry.

Mr. LeClair: Every area of rural PEI has been touched by our government from tip to tip. Definitely we're going to continue to make announcements. With all the funding that we have gathered together here from the good work of our treasurer, we have extra money to put around to rural communities and that's where we focus on.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the

Opposition.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I can't hear.

Speaker: Order, please, so we can have the question.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. I know how important rural Prince Edward Island is to PEI, but I think you should also realize how important urban Prince Edward Island is to PEI. When you start announcing projects in the city, it's coming out of the same funds that are used in rural PEI. My question to the minister: Why do you continue to try and divide rural and urban PEI? Why?

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is going to have to make up her mind which way she wants to go here.

Is it rural or urban? Because one day she's on one side of the fence, the next day she's on the other side of the fence. We're down the middle. We're One Island Community.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. LeClair: We help all areas, and if you look at our announcements, they're -

Speaker: Order, please!

We can't hear the minister.

Mr. LeClair: - spread out across rural and urban, and everybody gets to benefit from the money that we have (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I'm sorry, Madam Speaker, but I couldn't hear his answer to the question so I'm going to ask it again.

Why do you continue to try to divide rural and urban Prince Edward Island, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has been trying to do that for the last two and a half years and we've been working against it.

We've been working to fund all areas Prince Edward Island, whether they're rural or urban, and we'll certainly continue to do that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, when this government came in we had many businesses that were thriving. One that was in the middle of a transition to a new area, which is part of this government's vision for agriculture, was the hog industry.

This government decided that they're going to be investing - which is a good thing - \$40 million in community development initiatives over the next five years. It's also decided that it's going to invest \$60 million in the primary sectors over the next five years.

Mr. Minister, you lost an industry that was worth 100 million in one year. My question to you, minister, is: Why are you misleading Islanders that you're going to be investing all of the money that you have committed to rural development is actually money that's already been in the budget? It's not new money. It's still there. It's just moved around. Why are you misleading Islanders with this supposedly new investment?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of new money, since we came in, put into the agriculture industry, into the hog industry - we put a lot of money in when I was minister to help them decide whether they wanted to stay into the business, whether they wanted to continue in a new direction or whether they wanted to farm some other product.

Since then we've also been helping them with transportation and whatever way we can. When we got into power, the day I was sworn in I think, we had that hog plant issue

on the table and it was such a mess at the time. It had been let go so far because nothing was being done waiting for an election to happen. There was absolutely no way that hog plant could continue the way it was going. It would have cost astronomical amounts of money to get us out of that issue.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The new direction for agriculture, niche marketing.

My question to the same minister of rural development. Minister, you said that all decisions around the Cabinet will now be, and I quote from your deputy premier: "That means everything government does, everything government considers, will take into account the impact on rural communities." That was in January. I'm curious as to why you would never consider rural PEI before that. It took you two and a half years to figure that out. Why?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: If you look at the initiatives, Madam Speaker, that this government has brought in since day one, we've been doing this since day one, and if the Leader of the Opposition had have been watching she would know that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As we travel Island-wide we certainly hear what this government's doing. My question to the same rural minister. Why were you not considering the needs of rural PEI until January of this year? Why, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, it's like I said before.

This government is focused on all of Prince Edward Island, tip to tip, One Island Community. Definitely we have been doing that. We have been focused on that right from the start. The reason why you can't see a change is because the change was always there since we've been in.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Business centres

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, let's continue with this lovely inaction plan.

My question for the minister. For about 20 years there has been federal government facilities called business centres throughout the Province of Prince Edward Island: active communities east, resources west, Central Development Corporation. We also have numerous Access PEI sites. The centres all provide business information, community economic development information and have helped businesses across PEI grow.

My question to the minister. Why are you setting up three new business centres when these already exist?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, we're not setting up.

We are combining a lot of the initiatives across - that these centres do that are spread out all over the area, we're combining them and we want to put them under one roof so it will be one-stop shopping. Definitely, we're not setting anything up and shutting something else down. We want to combine them.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. So all the fanfare, all the glossy documents, all the announcement of a new access centre is really nothing more than moving some of your provincial government employees into a facility that already exists to provide information.

I'm curious. Why, now, do you want to duplicate effort?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, if the hon. Leader of the Opposition has been around rural PEI as much as she says she has in the last two and a half years, she would have heard what we've heard in the 12 to 16 meetings we had leading up to the Rural

Action Plan.

Every small business in every community was saying that it was just running from one place to the other. You get to one centre, they tell you to go somewhere else. What they wanted was a centre where they could get all their answers in one place and that's what we're doing.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Islanders have Internet now, supposedly, really good high-speed Internet.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: My question to the minister is: If we already have federal rural information economic development centres known as active communities east, resources west and Central Development Corporation, and now we have people that have access through the Internet to all this information, why are you duplicating effort?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: We're not duplicating anything at all. Like I said, we're putting them all under one roof. We're making it easier for people to access what we have to offer as governments, whether it be federal, provincial or municipal.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

New vision for agriculture

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Politically motivated buildings. My question to the minister, the same minister. Minister, I read that one of the major priorities is supposed to be partnering in an industry-led process to articulate a new vision for the future of agriculture. Now you're saying that after a year ago you released a new report on a new vision for agriculture, but perhaps you do have to elaborate on this. After all, there is foreclosure out there like crazy, very few hogs being produced in the province anymore, fewer and fewer cattle on our land, and the potato industry's in a crisis. It's quite a vision.

My question to the minister of rural development: Please tell us what this new vision is?

Mr. M. Currie: Take your time. We want to hear this.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: The new agriculture vision has been in place since we took over three years ago.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) now.

Mr. LeClair: No, you know. Farmers have to reassess what products they want to be growing in the marketplace that they can make a viable living at. Things have to

change. People can't always do the same things. We've been looking at oilseeds, we're looking at energy, we're looking at all the programs that the agriculture minister's brought in just this winter here. If you'd like, I can get him to describe some of those for you.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Farmers and energy

Leader of the Opposition: No, actually, I prefer you, as minister of rural development, to describe it for me.

But my question is this, for the people of PEI, especially. You mention in your inaction plan opportunities around energy. My question is: When are we going to see RFPs for farmers to be able to supply heat to some of the provincial government buildings? Are we going to see that right now?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry.

Mr. Brown: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The tender is being prepared now. Basically what's going to entail - I have the environmental advisory committee looking at that right now, and the sustainable forest council is also looking at that. A report will be coming to my office early next week or the week after.

We had to go out and find out what is available out there in terms of biomass in order to use as an energy source in the government buildings throughout Prince Edward Island. So basically the tender is going to include - we're going to list all the government buildings within Prince Edward Island, we're going to go to tender, or RFP, and we're going to allow Islanders to bid on these projects.

Companies can form and pick a set of buildings out in a particular area and tender on that project. My goal, and this government's goal, is to see Island biomass and Island energy going up and down the roads instead of foreign oil trucks, Madam Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: The rural development minister - actually, there is great capacity across PEI, and a lot of the farmers have been using barley burners for years, we're getting into switchgrass.

To the rural development minister, though, it'd be nice to see who's leading the rural development opportunities on that RFP.

Survey results

But we're going to go to the survey. It's interesting, minister, last year you had an online survey. It's interesting, the fact that in this survey, supposedly, agriculture was not even a priority. My question to you is: Do you think it was an accurate survey from

people across PEI who supposedly didn't mention one thing in agriculture being a priority? Do you believe those results?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, the survey was definitely available to all Islanders.

It was talked about at every one of the strategy meetings we had and every meeting that we had in the rural communities. It was a survey that we looked at and saw what Islanders wanted to see in the Rural Action Plan. Definitely, we use that as a yardstick. Everybody had an opportunity, both online and through our department, and through all the meetings we had, to participate in that survey.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Would you explain to the House the methodology of the survey and why you chose to put the survey out in the summer? Would you tell us if people could participate more than once, and if you ruled out any provincial government employees or agency people participating in that survey?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, the survey was open to all Islanders.

We didn't rule out anybody. Anyone who wanted to participate could participate. This was a strategy for Prince Edward Island, and that's the way we planned it, and that's the way we put it out there.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Sherwood.

Seniors' Home Repair Program and legal life interest documents

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is to the hon. Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour. Madam Minister, last fall I asked the former minister a question in the House regarding seniors that have legal life interest documents that are living in their own homes but are unable to access the Seniors' Home Repair Program.

Madam Minister, has there been any developments within the department that may allow these seniors to access this wonderful program that is now available?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour.

Ms. Sherry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would like to thank the Member from Charlottetown-Sherwood for that question. The Seniors' Home Repair Program has been an excellent program across the province. We've had tremendous interest in the program, and we want to ensure that all seniors that meet the eligibility criteria are able to access that program. Before, we would consider anyone who has transferred

their life interest over. Also, just to add to that, we do still have a huge waiting list for people who are waiting to get access to that program.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Sherwood.

Mr. Mitchell: Madam Minister, if these affected seniors are willing to put their names back on the deeds, would they then qualify for the plan if they go out and do that legally?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour.

Ms. Sherry: Madam Speaker, that would be a consideration, for sure, if they wanted to take the title back, and if they met all of the other eligibility requirements for the program, then they would certainly be eligible.

I'd also like to add that the program has been extremely successful, and everyone is happy that we reinstated that program in 2007.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Justice Bastarache's mandate

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is to the hon. Premier.

An Hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gallant: Yesterday the hon. Premier made a great announcement about the renewal of the French language act, and that Justice Bastarache would oversee the rollout of this act.

Could the hon. Premier elaborate on Justice Bastarache's mandate in this great announcement?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Merci beaucoup, madame la présidente.

Thank you very much, madam Speaker.

C'est un honneur pour nous d'avoir le juge Bastarache pour nous aider ici à l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, parce que nos communautés acadiennes et francophones sont vraiment importantes pour la province et puis on pense qu'on a besoin de bonnes lois pour cette communauté.

It's an honour for us to have Judge Bastarache helping us on Prince Edward Island, because our Acadian and Francophone communities are very important for the province and we believe we need appropriate legislation for this community.

We're very fortunate to have justice Bastarache helping us out. Basically, our act is a little over 10 years old. We need to find out whether or not the act should be worked on to improve it for today's world or

whether or not we should start with a whole new act. Justice Bastarache is recognized across the country as a leader when it comes to French services, and we're very looking forward to his help on this file.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Survey results (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Back to the rural development minister. We were talking about methodology in your survey, in terms of when 600 people participated.

Mr. Bagnall: (Indistinct) supposed to be any French in Question Period.

Leader of the Opposition: What checks and balances were in that to ensure that perhaps you were hearing from 600 different individuals rather than -

Mr. Bagnall: That was the agreement. No French in Question Period.

Leader of the Opposition: - perhaps 300 people that did the survey a couple of times?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, why would anyone want to do the survey any more than once?

This is a Rural Action Plan, and it's for rural Islanders and for Islanders across Prince Edward Island. Why would I make a plan and then think that somebody's going to try and ruin it or undermine it for some reason? I have no reason to even think that. This is for the betterment of Prince Edward Island. Why would anybody try and do that?

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, it's important in any survey - or any type - to have methodology reliability checks in there.

My point is, I just want to know from the rural development minister: Are you confident and comfortable with research from the survey and also the consultations? That when your inaction plan came out, you're really comfortable that you're following the wishes of people that participated in that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: You say you're the biggest proponent of rural Prince Edward Island, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, but at the same time you're suggesting that Islanders want to - are not honest?

Is that what you're trying to suggest? Am I happy with the plan? I am ecstatic with the Rural Action Plan. It's a plan that we're going to move forward in the next five years. From what I've seen since it was announced, every month there's something

in the paper that involves rural PEI and part of our Rural Action Plan, and these announcements are great. I hope they keep coming forward and they will keep coming forward. It's a great plan.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Paint shop moving to Tignish

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

According to a section in the report that was called the sectors of priority, on page 41 of your report, it actually shows the people who participated in the survey, and also the consultation process, ranked government decentralization as number two towards the very bottom of the list.

So could you explain your politically motivated decision to move the sign shop to Tignish?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: I'm sorry, (Indistinct) paint shop. Sorry.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Premier Ghiz: The sign shop you guys did.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) yes, that's right.

Mr. LeClair: Paint and body shop, yes.

Madam Speaker, I'm very pleased that the paint and body shop is coming to Tignish.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LeClair: It's a great announcement for Tignish. Why shouldn't we, as rural Islanders, as people in the farthest outreaching areas of Prince Edward Island, have the ability to work in public service jobs the same as anyone else?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, this is a minister who said he was comfortable and happy and so excited about the rural inaction plan. Well, on the list of priorities that people have told this government, they wanted to see economic development, the environment, community infrastructure, broadband development, land use, labour market development, entrepreneurship. It goes on and on until you get to the very second last one, which is government decentralization. So it was a politically motivated decision.

Community economic development investment funds

Now, my next question to the minister, one thing that was in the report that was actually quite good, was community economic development investment funds. I'm curious:

Where are you at with delivering on that promise?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, I'm glad that you mentioned all those sectors of priority because as you mention them and go down the list, we've reacted and enacted, acted them all.

Look at the Bloomfield call centre. We just opened that last week. Fifty new jobs coming there and growing. That place was closed since 2005. Rural broadband, you mentioned. We just completed that. All these strategies - we put \$7 million into renewal energy initiative in agriculture, \$2.2 million in the PEI Seafood Processors Association. Holland College announcement up west. All excellent announcements. All good for rural PEI.

Why shouldn't we deserve the same as everyone else on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, I believe the minister of finance actually passed to the minister of rural development.

Maybe you're planning on making an announcement, but we were really encouraged when we saw the opportunity of a community economic development investment fund -

Premier Ghiz: So now you're supporting it.

Leader of the Opposition: It also said that it was going to be in this year's budget. Could the minister inform us: Is this another one that we're going to have to wait for because it's polling week, or do you want to explain where that's at?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, CEDIFs are definitely a way that we want to go in this government and they're a great way for investment in rural communities.

The provincial treasurer has handed me a statement which he is going to make later here on this morning just on that community economic development investment funds project.

Everything that we've announced since we've come into power we've enacted, or acted upon, and definitely we will act upon that one as well.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, another question to the minister.

It's interesting in terms of how everything is so politically motivated that that fund could have been really valuable for people, but it's held off until you're in the House to make a glorified statement.

An Hon. Member: We don't agree (Indistinct).

Rural youth conference

Leader of the Opposition: My question to the minister of rural development -

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) - pre-announcing (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Minister, last week you also were bragging about your rural youth conference. Do you think hosting a one-day conference actually reaches the goal of a total consultation with all the youth in the province? Do you think you've reached that goal?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: No, certainly it doesn't reach that goal, and that's why I have a student intern right now working in my department, working on actually what came out of that conference.

Definitely she will be acting upon all of the suggestions that came out of it and acting with the youth that were involved.

I've had a lot of emails, very positive emails from the youth, and within the next year, two years, three years, up to five years, we will be working with the youth and working on the initiatives that they suggested. The young intern that I have working, Kaley, is doing an excellent job.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Insufficient housing for youth

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

One issue that surfaced quite a bit in Prince County is the whole issue with youth of couch surfing. My question to you. Many youth are homeless. Since you've done the consultation with youth and you have someone in your own office working on this, what's the solution for youth that have insufficient housing?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, there's a lot of areas that the youth can go right now in government involved with helping the homeless youth.

I definitely have this young lady working on all the suggestions that came, and certainly there are areas in government that already work in those areas. They're doing a great job and they will continue to do that job.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, it's a big concern from Alberton to Tignish, and also the O'Leary area, but I'll go to the next question to the rural minister.

Youth advisory council

Youth are interested in the establishment of a youth advisory council. Are you committed to follow through with this recommendation from youth?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries,

Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, we're committed to looking at all the recommendations and working on them all, and want to move all the suggestions and recommendations forward if it's possible at all.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Youth on Premier's councils

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, youth are also wondering about youth representation on Premier's councils.

Are you committed to do that as well, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, like I said, we're definitely looking at all the suggestions.

This is an ongoing affair. I mean, these things are not going to happen overnight. Nothing happens overnight, but actually our government is making a very good job of making things happen. But definitely it takes time, and like you said, you got to look at the surveys and take them - make sure that what's in them is what Islanders are really saying, and that's what we're doing, and we're going over all the information.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Settlement strategy (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, to the rural development minister, in terms of three years in government and still thinking and talking and reading, but what people want is this.

One of the areas that all across PEI is a huge issue is population. In your inaction plan you talk quite a bit about rural declining populations. It talks about that you're actually working with the Population Secretariat. I'm curious. Who in your department's the lead, and what contribution has the department made to the famous, how many times, fantasy one, two, three, delayed settlement strategy? Who's working on that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Settlement strategy?

Speaker: Oh, excuse me.

The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The work of the Population Secretariat is - they're doing great work under the CEO of the Population Secretariat, Mr. Jim Ferguson. He and his staff are working very hard to put the settlement strategy together.

As the Leader of the Opposition is aware, we've also looked for some outside consultative advice on that, and we're working with MRSB as well. As I indicated

a number of times, it's very important that we be comprehensive and inclusive with our settlement strategy.

The previous administration saw fit to make cuts to the Population Secretariat, the same as they cut a lot of things, like the Seniors' Home Repair Program is another great example. We've reinvested in the Population Secretariat. We've reinvested in the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada. We're going to have a settlement strategy that's very inclusive and meets the needs of our new Islanders.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Final question, the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

People are always telling us they're kind of tired of the story telling in this House and the rhetoric, but my question to the rural development minister: Who is the lead in your department that's working with the Population Secretariat on this famous settlement strategy? Who's your lead?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition talked about stories. I want to tell a story about a government that came to power two and a half years ago. After 11 years of neglect our government came to power, and we said rural PEI needs to be recognized in this

province. That's why we took agriculture and fisheries, we split up the two departments. We started a new initiative called the rural development department. We made the minister of agriculture the Deputy Premier of the province.

Then we went and we started making investments, whether or not it's cold storage down in Souris, whether or not we're talking about a new manor in Souris, a new K to 12 school. We moved to Montague a new high school, a new bridge, a new department, a new wellness centre. A new Dunedin Bridge that was rejected for years. We're putting Holland College up west. RCW training in Souris.

Our government is all about rural PEI, Madam Speaker, and we're very proud of that.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]