

April 20, 2016

**Standing Committee on Communities, Land and Environment
First Report of the Second Session, Sixty-fifth General Assembly
Committee Activities**

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly;

The Standing Committee on Communities, Land and Environment is charged with matters concerning municipal affairs and provincial planning, land and local governance, environment, water, forests, wildlife; and justice and public safety, intergovernmental affairs, Aboriginal affairs, Acadian and Francophone affairs, Status of Women, the PEI Human Rights Commission, charities and emergency measures.

Committee Membership

Permanent members of your committee are:

Kathleen Casey, Chair (District 14, Charlottetown – Lewis Point)
Peter Bevan-Baker (District 17, Kellys Cross – Cumberland)
Sonny Gallant (District 24, Evangeline – Miscouche)
Sidney MacEwen (District 7, Morell – Mermaid)
Pat Murphy (District 26, Alberton – Roseville)
Hal Perry (District 27, Tignish – Palmer Road)
Janice Sherry (District 21, Summerside – Wilmot)
Brad Trivers (District 18, Rustico – Emerald)

Bush Dumville (District 15, West Royalty – Springvale) served as a substitute member.

Changes in Membership

On January 22, 2016, Hal Perry (District 27, Tignish – Palmer Road) and Pat Murphy (District 26, Alberton - Roseville) replaced Hon. Robert Henderson (District 25, O’Leary – Inverness) and Hon. Tina Mundy (District 22, Summerside – St. Eleanors), respectively, as permanent members of your committee.

Committee Activities

Your committee met on February 10, 2016, to receive a briefing from Hon. Robert Mitchell, Minister of Communities, Land and Environment and Todd Dupuis, Executive Director for Environment. The briefing covered various topics related to the Department’s mandate, including climate change, municipalities, watershed groups, and the implementation of recommendations from recent reports on land use and local governance.

On March 9, 2016, your committee met to receive a briefing from Dr. Adam Fenech and Derek Ellis of the UPEI Climate Lab, on climate change in Prince Edward Island and the Coastal Impacts Visualization Environment (CLIVE) resource.

On April 14, 2016, your committee met to discuss its report to the Assembly.

Recommendations

1. Your committee recommends that a new climate change adaptation strategy for PEI include coastal protection planning on the basis of littoral zones.

Your committee looks forward to the development of a new climate change adaptation strategy for PEI, expected to be released in 2017. Coastal erosion caused by rising sea levels and wave action is arguably climate change's most significant impact on our Island. We are already losing land at a surprising rate in many areas, and this will only worsen in years to come. To date, efforts to reduce coastal erosion have largely been undertaken on a property-by-property basis. Your committee is of the view that it would be more effective to coordinate protection efforts according to littoral zones, i.e. coastal regions established on the basis of common features, composition and erosive influences. PEI's coast consists of seventeen (17) such zones.

2. Your committee recommends that Government work with private landowners, harbour authorities, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and other stakeholders to encourage coastal protection efforts that are suitable for the littoral zone in which they occur.

Engineered shoreline protection measures must work in concert with the natural processes of the particular littoral zone. Enhancement of dunes, offshore breakwaters, the so-called living shoreline concept and other protective measures, as well as armouring, should be employed where they will work well with the structure of the shoreline and the wave action it receives. Shoreline armouring is a common response to erosion, but is not always the best response. Imported rock armouring is expensive, is not always suitable to the task, and deteriorates over time. An armoured shore on one property can also have the unintended effect of increasing erosion on neighbouring, unarmoured properties. Instead of always resorting to armouring the shore, greater cooperation and consultation should be employed to assess the most appropriate methods of coastline protection for the given coastal region.

3. Your committee recommends that climate change adaptation and coastal protection planning also include a review of coastal development regulations and, where appropriate, restrictions and increased setbacks.

There is no denying the appeal of a home or cottage on the shore of our beautiful province. But it is time to face the fact that in many areas the shoreline setback for structures that worked in the past is now insufficient given increased rates of erosion and storm surges. Minimum shoreline setbacks for new structures need to be reassessed to protect against structural failures in the coming decades. In littoral zones particularly vulnerable to erosion and storm

surges, prohibition of development in low lying areas, or within an increased distance from the shore, may be in order. Opponents to such restrictions may insist that it is the property owner who bears all the risk of developing near the shore, and that they should be permitted to do so provided they are aware of the costs and risks involved. But society also bears risks and costs when development is permitted near vulnerable shores. Public infrastructure such as roads and power lines are put at risk. As the shore washes away, wells and septic systems are exposed, allowing for saltwater intrusion and contamination of groundwater. Susceptibility to flooding from storm surges puts greater strain on emergency services. Simply put, in many areas we can no longer build near the shore in a safe and sustainable manner.

Conclusion

Your committee thanks the witnesses that provided testimony during recent meetings. Your committee looks forward to continuing its work on issues relevant to its mandate in the coming months, such as watershed management, emergency preparedness, management of contaminated sites, municipal amalgamation and annexation, and other topics.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Casey, MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on Communities, Land and Environment