

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Energy

DATE OF HEARING: 14 SEPTEMBER 2017

MEETING STATUS: PUBLIC

LOCATION: LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER, HON. GEORGE COLES BUILDING, CHARLOTTETOWN

SUBJECT: WORK PLAN

COMMITTEE:

Bush Dumville, MLA West Royalty-Springvale [Chair]
Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker, Leader of the Third Party
Richard Brown, MLA Charlottetown-Victoria Park
Hon. Doug Currie, Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture
Hon. Robert Henderson (replaces Hon. Alan McIsaac, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries)
Sidney MacEwen, MLA Morell-Mermaid
Matthew MacKay, MLA Kensington-Malpeque (replaces Hon. Jamie Fox, Leader of the Opposition)
Hal Perry, Tignish-Palmer Road

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Hon. Jamie Fox, Leader of the Opposition
Hon. Alan McIsaac, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

none

GUESTS:

none

STAFF:

Emily Doiron, Clerk Assistant (Journals, Committees and House Operations)

Edited by Hansard

The Committee met at 1:30 p.m.

Chair (Dumville): I'll call the meeting to order.

I thank everybody for being here and I would like to welcome Minister Robert Henderson who is replacing Alan McIsaac, and I'd like to welcome Matthew MacKay who is in for Jamie Fox today. We will begin because we have a new format here. Some of you weren't here yesterday, so I'll have the clerk just explain a little bit about the new format before we begin.

Clerk Assistant (E. Doiron): Hi everyone.

We're in the Legislative Chamber here with our new live broadcasting initiative. So, just some information about the new setup is that I guess the first most important is that only one mic can be turned on at once on the members' desks, so it's important to get the verbal recognition from the Chair before you start speaking. That will kind of signal to our audio visual technical staff to turn the microphones and cameras on so it just helps with, I guess, getting all of your comments on the audio and on the video as well.

Then, we'll be using the gavel for different signals with the video broadcast. To start and end the meeting will be the gavel. When we go into recess, the gavel, and if there's any disorder and the Chair needs to regain order of the meeting, the gavel will be tapped and then the video and the mics will go just back to the table.

That's kind of some housekeeping stuff to start and if anybody has any questions, I can answer or we can move onto the next item.

Chair: Thank you, Emily.

I'll ask for an adoption of the agenda.

Mr. R. Brown: Moved.

Chair: Richard Brown.

Mr. Currie: Seconded.

Chair: Doug Currie, second.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Chair: We're off to a great start.

Item number three: Discussion of the committee's work plan.

(a): A request from the hon. Jamie Fox on the recent blackout of Island telecommunications infrastructure.

The Chair will give way to Matthew MacKay because he is substituting for Jamie Fox.

Mr. MacKay: Actually, I'm going to pass that over to MLA MacEwen.

Chair: The Chair recognizes Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

I think what Jamie was trying to do – we remember the telecommunications, I'm going to call it a mini-blackout or a blackout that happened a few weeks ago on a Friday afternoon, and I think when I spoke to Jamie his main concern was about emergency services and making sure that we still had access to those types of things: 911, fire, police, ambulance, all that kind of stuff.

I would put forward that maybe our committee first send letters to Bell Aliant, EMO, ITSS to seek more information on what contingencies exist to address a future similar situation and also maybe an update on what they've done to make sure that we do have access to communications for emergency services in the future. If the committee was agreeable, we send those letters out. We see what response we get and then maybe decide to go and take matters further after that.

Chair: Thank you, Sidney.

What I'll do is if you want – if anybody would like to give us their views on it and before I ask Mr. MacEwen to move a motion.

Mr. R. Brown: No, we're good.

Chair: The floor is open.

Would you make a motion, Mr. MacEwen?

Mr. MacEwen: Sure.

I move that the committee send letters to Bell Aliant, EMO, and ITSS to seek information on what contingencies exist to address a future similar communications blackout with emergency services and an update on any work they've done in light of that example.

Chair: Discussion on Sidney MacEwen's motion?

Everybody ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Chair: All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: 'Aye'!

Chair: Contrary?

Motion carried.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Item number 3(b): Outstanding business and update from our Committee Clerk, Emily.

Clerk Assistant: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The only item of outstanding business from last spring was to organize a meeting with representatives from IRAC, so if it's agreeable to the committee I can work with them to schedule such a meeting for this fall.

Mr. R. Brown: Chair?

Chair: Richard Brown.

Mr. R. Brown: This is a meeting with the staff of IRAC?

Clerk Assistant: Yeah, so it would be representatives from the Island Regulatory Appeals Commission and in the letter it was to discuss gas pricing and scheduling policies in the province.

Chair: Did the committee agree to that previously?

Clerk Assistant: Yes, it was agreed to. A letter has been sent to –

Chair: It was previously agreed to.

Mr. R. Brown: But seeing now that the Auditor General is in reviewing IRAC, shouldn't we wait until the report of IRAC, until the Auditor General's report and then we can have that backup information to have the discussions on?

Chair: What are the wishes of the committee?

Peter Bevan-Baker.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, I don't see great value in duplicating the work that the Auditor General is about to embark on, so I'd agree with Richard's suggestion.

Mr. R. Brown: Thanks.

Chair: Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

Do we know exactly what the scope of the Auditor General's work – or like what exactly she's going to look into at IRAC?

Chair: Richard Brown.

Mr. R. Brown: I assume it would be like any other audit. She does value-for-money audit and organization audit, and how they make their decisions and it would be a comprehensive audit. It's not a financial – it is a financial, but what I get from Jamie Fox's announcement on the review and the Auditor General, is that it's a full review like any other review. So, she would be reviewing decisions, how they're made, the cost of how things are.

Chair: Sidney.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

Yeah, I think that's a fair assessment and I know our committee has had IRAC in before with a similar presentation so I think it's fair to see what the AG does with her investigation and then I would still say we keep Jamie's request on the books just in case – whatever happens next spring.

I'm okay with the delay until the AG's report, if everybody else is.

Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacEwen.

Everybody in favour?

Mr. Currie: (Indistinct)

Chair: Oh sorry.

The hon. Doug Currie.

Mr. Currie: Is there a timeline on the Auditor General's work and when it's made public?

Chair: I don't know what the timeline is.

Mr. Currie: Or would that be – I'm just curious.

Chair: Does anybody here know what the timeline is on the Auditor General's work?

Mr. Currie: Or (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: Again, to the report in the paper is that it will be in next March's report, her annual report. It's not a special audit so therefore it would be in the March report.

Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Currie: My next question was: Would it be just part of her annual report to the Assembly?

Mr. R. Brown: Yes.

Mr. Currie: Okay, just so we're clear.

Chair: The clerk will have it on her agenda and she'll bring it forward when that report becomes available. We'll do that scheduling.

Everybody okay with that?

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Chair: Thank you.

I guess we've probably covered all the new business. Is there any new business?

Go ahead, Peter Bevan-Baker.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I have a few issues, topics; I'd like this committee to consider digging into in the next little while. Do you want me to list them off for you, Chair?

Chair: Yes.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Sure.

The first one is an update on the implementation of the energy strategy. Now, that is meant to be coming into force or at least will be made public this fall, so we've been waiting on that for a while and there's several aspects of that I'm very keen to find out about: Incentives for solar, for example, net metering and the RFP on modernizing our grid. Where does that stand? What alternatives to the CT4 generator are being considered?

I think it's important that we have an update on that so I would request that this committee be given a firsthand update on that.

Chair: Anybody else wants –

Mr. MacEwen: Chair?

Chair: Everybody is in favour?

Mr. R. Brown: Sure.

Chair: Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

I like the request. The Standing Committee on Communities, Land and Environment requested a somewhat similar request and it was unfortunate the minister said that he was going to delay it until after, I believe, an update or after a report was released or something like that. I'd be very much in favour of trying to push it through this committee as well.

I would support that.

Chair: Peter Bevan-Baker.

Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker: Do you want to vote on that first request?

Chair: If the committee is all in agreement, we don't need a motion.

Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker: Perfect.

I have another issue, Chair.

Chair: You got that, Emily?

Clerk Assistant: Yes, I do.

Chair: Peter Bevan-Baker.

Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker: The second issue is a more specific one and it's about the recent bankruptcy of Arsenault woodworks up west. I'm concerned about how the province is going to supply the woodchips to the increasing number of boilers that we have heating public spaces on the Island. We've been told repeatedly that all of these woodchips come from Island sources and with the bankruptcy of Arsenault; I'm just concerned that that's going to continue.

I'd like to know what the province's plans are for supplying the woodchips for the publicly-owned boilers are.

Chair: Hon. Robert Henderson.

Mr. Henderson: I'll just give a little bit of an update on that. As the department of health, we have a number of contracts with woodchip providers in delivering heat to a number of our facilities. We have no problem finding woodchips, or accessibility to woodchips. Actually, the company you're referencing to that the loans were issues is not in existence anymore. It hasn't been in existence in some time. There's another company of a similar name that's operating and does provide woodchips. That company is totally different. They're kind of the same but they're not.

Chair: Peter Bevan-Baker.

Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker: Totally different except that the equipment that they kept back and are using in the new company is the woodchip maker, or whatever it's called, wood chip chipper.

Chair: Woodchip is (Indistinct)

Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker: I'd just like an update on that.

Chair: Anybody else?

Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

It is good that we have two ministers right here to give us an update. When you say

totally different, what do you mean by totally?

Mr. Henderson: They're different companies; they're different incorporated companies. I think the one that's in existence that we get our woodchips from is called Arsenault's 2016, if I'm right here. The company that had the loan that defaulted on its loan is a different company. Arsenault's Sawmill, I think was the name of that company.

All I'm just saying is, is that the sawmill operation is not in operation, it's right on the border of my district so I know a little bit about it. But the woodchip company, which is Arsenault's 2016, is still providing woodchips to various suppliers and companies. Anyway, not hearing if there are any issues in the supply of woodchips. I have no problem if you're wanting to have a review of the company for its lending issues of the past or whatever, but if the issue is about getting woodchips we're not having any problem finding woodchips for our businesses or our operations in health care anyway.

Chair: Peter, does that satisfy you?

Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker: Chair, I mean my main concern is that the woodchips that you're referring to, minister, are actually gathered on-Island here, that we're not using woodchips from off-Island and that that economic activity is benefitting Islanders; if you can reassure me that that's the case?

Mr. Henderson: I certainly wouldn't know where all the woodchips are coming from but it seems to me – there are a number of different suppliers of woodchips, it's not only Arsenault's 2016 Inc. or whatever, but we're not having any problem finding woodchips or accessing woodchips to the companies that provide us with heat at our healthcare facility.

I'll only say it on assumption that most of them are coming from PEI because they are operational on PEI. But as 100% of them, I wouldn't know that answer.

Chair: Sidney MacEwen and then Peter Bevan-Baker.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, is this a new contract that this company has or have they had a woodchip contract for awhile?

Mr. Henderson: The way it works with us and our health care facilities, we have companies. I think there are three or four different companies that provide heat to the health care facilities. They access woodchips from companies like Arsenault's, like, I think the (Indistinct) there's a number of individual suppliers of woodchips that are out there. That would be up to those particular companies that are providing us with the heat in our health care facilities to access woodchips wherever they access them.

That's why I go back to saying, I can't confirm that every one of them are coming from PEI, but I know there are a number of woodchip companies like Arsenault's and like some others I had mentioned that are providing wood chips and they are operational on PEI. I just don't know if 100% of their wood chips are coming from PEI.

Like I say, if that's the question then that's a whole different story than an issue about the supply, I guess. If the question is supply on PEI, well then that's a question that I don't have an answer to and maybe that's something that he can get some clarification on.

Chair: Peter Bevan-Baker.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I think, given that there is some question as to where the supply is coming from, and I personally have concerns about making sure that even if it is Island wood chips that we're dealing with here that the management of the forests is being done sustainably. Given that the number of boilers has increased fairly dramatically in the last little while, and therefore the demand for wood chips has gone up, I would just like to know, to be reassured, and to find out where those wood chips come from and that they're being done sustainably.

My request is that we have somebody in from the department to explain that to us.

Chair: Okay, you'd rather somebody in from the department than a request by letter?

Mr. R. Brown: Chair?

Chair: Who is calling?

Mr. R. Brown: Me.

Chair: Richard Brown.

Mr. R. Brown: I think we're having the department of energy in on the energy strategy and that we could ask that question and they could be prepared to answer that question at those meetings.

Would that be okay, Peter?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I'm fine with that.

Chair: Okay

Mr. R. Brown: Make sure that that's one of the questions that they have that – because he brings up a good point. We should be using Island –

Chair: Okay.

Mr. R. Brown: – and a sustainable environment, too.

Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you.

Chair: Emily, would you duly record that and pass that information on?

Clerk Assistant: Yes. I can.

Chair: Are you satisfied with that, Mr. Baker?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yes.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Okay.

Mr. MacKay: New business, Chair.

Chair: New business. Are you finished?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yes, I am.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Matthew MacKay.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to bring some new business up on Slemon Park. Since it's the biggest piece of PEI infrastructure owned by the province right now, I was wondering if the committee could request representatives from IIDI and Slemon Park to come in and give a briefing of basically what has taken place over the last 18 months.

We just saw in August that there was a \$3.2 million loan approved by Cabinet and I just thought it might be a good way for them to bring the committee – to come into committee to give an update to us and the public of what's happened over the past 18 months.

Chair: Anybody else?

An Hon. Member: I support that.

Chair: Okay.

An Hon. Member: I support it.

Chair: You support it? Okay.

Mr. R. Brown: It's a great idea.

Chair: Peter?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yes.

Chair: Everybody seems to be in agreement, Mr. MacKay. I don't think we need a motion. The clerk will put that forward.

Mr. MacKay: That's great.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.

Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

I also have a piece of new business. I'd like an update, I guess, from the minister of economic development on the Internet roll-out. When I say Internet, I mean the real and functional current-day high-speed Internet roll-out.

I know people in our communities are seeing Xplornet towers go up. We've heard talk of a second phase Internet speed test that was supposed to happen this summer. We do remember the Premier's tentative promise about the best Internet in Canada, last spring. I think our committee should hear an update on how that's going as we approach the end of this year.

Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacEwen.

Any discussion? Everybody in favour?

Mr. R. Brown: Sure.

Chair: We'll have the clerk put that on the agenda for you, Mr. MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Awesome, thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

Any other new business?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Chair.

Chair: Peter Bevan-Baker.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just interested in an update, also, on the proposed province's approach to carbon pricing. We heard something about that a little while ago and then there was sort of inference it would be a regional approach, but it's been crickets for the last little while on that. I'd like an update from the department on what they're considering in terms of carbon pricing for the province.

Chair: Anybody wish to speak on that?

Clerk Assistant: I believe that carbon pricing is before communities, land and environment and a letter has been sent out on that topic.

Chair: The clerk has some information.

Do you want to give the information to the committee, please?

Clerk Assistant: Yeah.

There has been a letter that has been issued from the Standing Committee on Communities, Land and Environment about

carbon pricing. So, I think that committee is already – has –

Chair: Dealing with it.

Clerk Assistant: – that item on their agenda.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Oh, okay. I should know that.

Chair: Okay.

Mr. R. Brown: You're only one man.

Chair: He's pretty good.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Chair: Sidney MacEwen.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Chair: Chair recognizes Sidney MacEwen.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

Question for the clerk, Emily, is that the one that the minister responded and said no, he wanted to wait until a report was finished? Or is that a different request?

Because I would be supportive because the – we have got a deadline, I believe, of this year, right? The end of 2017 for it – to have the plan to be implemented, so I would think we're either fairly well along or fairly well along in an ask to the federal government for a delay. Either one of those things must be happening.

Clerk Assistant: Yes. A letter of invitation was issued to the department to talk about carbon pricing to the communities, land and environment committee and then there was a reply back that they could come in after a report was public – published, sorry, to help with their presentation on that topic.

That topic has been, kind of, discussed already at the communities, land and environment.

Mr. MacEwen: So that's – sorry, Chair.

Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

That's the request that the minister said, that no, he didn't want to come until after the report, or were there multiple requests for the minister?

Clerk Assistant: One request has gone out. And yes, that was the issue that – he said that he would suggest waiting until that document is public before he came into that committee.

Mr. MacEwen: Okay.

Chair: Okay.

Mr. MacEwen: I would still support sending a letter –

Chair: From this –

Mr. MacEwen: – for this committee.

Chair: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah. I disagree with the – I know it's a different committee, communities, land and environment. When we meet next week, I'll voice my disagreement with that, but I wish he would come in earlier, but we'll see –

Chair: Oh, to the other committee?

Mr. MacEwen: To that committee, and to this committee. One of them, you know, we need an update. It's getting close to the end –

Chair: Okay.

Mr. MacEwen: – of the year.

Chair: Would it be – we should leave it there until next week to see how it goes on that committee?

Mr. MacEwen: I'll leave it up to Peter. It's your request so I would support his request today.

Chair: I just don't think two committees should be dealing with the same issue.

Mr. Currie: Fair enough.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Chair, could I just get some clarification from the clerk though, about the –

Chair: Yes.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – response we got the department. Maybe I misheard, but I got the sense they declined the invitation to come in.

Clerk Assistant: It wasn't a decline. It was just that they suggested that until this report is published, or I guess finalized in mid-October, that they wait to meet with the Standing Committee on Communities, Land and Environment at that time. It wasn't a decline of that invitation it was just waiting for additional information on this report.

Chair: You didn't say mid-October before.

Clerk Assistant: Towards the end of October is when – yeah.

Chair: Okay.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Given that there is movement in one of the other committees, I'm prepared to withdraw that request.

Chair: Thank you, Peter.

Any other new business?

Do I have somebody for adjournment?

Mr. R. Brown: Adjourn.

Chair: Richard Brown.

Mr. MacEwen: Chair?

Chair: Oh.

Mr. MacEwen: I noticed we still have to talk about scheduling.

Chair: Oh, yes, sorry.

Clerk Assistant: I'll just –

Mr. MacEwen: Some people are in a rush to go.

Mr. R. Brown: Oh! He's starting that, okay (Indistinct)

Chair: It'll only take a minute.

Clerk Assistant: Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: No, I just did notice there are a lot of things on the agenda so we should try and make sure we have all of our weeks planned for the next – until we hit the Legislature. I heard somewhere in the audience there somebody talks about: Ah, it's eight weeks to Legislature anyway, so.

Chair: The clerk has already got all the dates reserved.

Mr. MacEwen: That's right.

Chair: So, it's just a matter of her slotting everybody in as they're available.

Mr. MacEwen: So, we're good with just randomly putting them in? There's no, you know, just as soon as they can come kind of thing?

Clerk Assistant: What I'll do after this meeting is I'll summarize all the decisions that were made and send to everybody, and once letters of invitation are out I'll work with the groups to schedule them in between now and when the House opens.

If it's okay with the committee, this time slot works for the committee so I'll be in contact with everyone once a meeting time has been confirmed with presenters.

Chair: It gives the clerk the flexibility to –

Mr. MacEwen: That sounds good to me.

Clerk Assistant: If, maybe, is there any preference of who would come in first, or just as people are available, I'll have them – we'll schedule them in and work, kind of, with their schedules?

Mr. MacEwen: I'm fine with that. I think they're all important, but I would stress that before the Legislature sits that we get all of those on the, you know, taken care of. I think we've had enough to book them in before that.

Chair: Thank you.

Mr. MacEwen: I did notice yesterday there were a few ministers that didn't really want to come to committee with 10-month updates, but I'm hoping we can get these gentlemen or women in quick.

Chair: Duly noted.

Doug Currie.

Mr. Currie: All the committees have very important issues to be dealing with, and I just think that it's imperative that we're very clear on the mandates of each and every committee in respect to the issues that they bring forward.

The Leader of the Third Party raised a number of issues that he wants to see on the agenda, on the work plan, so I just think that we need to be very clear on what issues we're bringing forward and what issues that are necessary to bring forward, because there's obviously a lot of work to do.

Chair: Thank you.

Can we pull the previous adjournment together?

Mr. R. Brown: We'll defer that adjournment to Sid when he wants to adjourn.

Mr. MacEwen: I'm good with it now.

Thank you.

Chair: Okay.

Mr. MacEwen: Keep that going forward (Indistinct)

Chair: Listen, we're adjourned for real.

The Committee adjourned