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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 20 JUNE 2019

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land, Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just before I read the notice, I do want to point out you were a little modest with your nephew, he's one of the top baseball pitchers on PEI for his age.

I had the privilege of coaching him two years ago and he helped us win the silver medal for the provincials.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thompson: Must have got that from his mother.

I wanted to thank the hon. member for the question you raised yesterday on land holdings. Firstly, I think important to put the question into context: the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* is administered through the Land Regulatory and Appeals Commission.

Certain land transactions require an application to be made, being non-resident acquisitions and corporate transactions that fall under the act.

Each application is reviewed in detail by the land analyst and the commission with their overview being presented and reviewed by the commission to make recommendations to Executive Council.

Considerations when reviewing each application includes regency, geography, development and current land holdings.

The hon. member specifically asked about the public ability to determine land ownership.

There is public land registry in Charlottetown at the Jones Building that the House records for Kings and Queens County. Likewise, Access PEI in Summerside that would determine land ownership.

The hon. member has also requested information on the aggregate land holdings. Aggregate land holdings include leased hold

interest and other related interest depending on the situation.

This information would not be housed at the registry office and it's specifically used for the application process where considerations for IRAC and making the recommendations to Executive Council.

This information is fluid and also subject to change, depending on the devastation of the land expiry leases.

As a result, there is no housing of aggregate land holdings as defined under the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* for corporations or non-residents.

If requested for application, given the information provided on the application, there would be potential privacy considerations that would need to be reviewed before we could commit to disclosing those documents.

A person can own 1,000 acres and 3,000 acres for aggregate.

Thank you.

Questions by Members

Speaker: Our first question from hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last night I attended the public meeting on short-term rentals hosted by the City of Charlottetown as part of their public consultation process. It was a packed house, with many Charlottetown residents taking the opportunity to share their experiences and concerns with city councilors and officials.

Short-term rentals that are listed via sharing sites like Airbnb, Vrbo and Home Stay now make up 1 in 50 privately owned dwellings in Charlottetown, while at the same time the vacancy rate for the city is at near zero.

While short-term rentals are not the sole cause of the current housing crisis, they are a contributing factor especially in the turnover of existing long-term rental units as tenants are renovicted.

Short-term rental regulations

A question to the minister responsible for Charlottetown: What conversations have you had with Charlottetown City Council about short-term rental regulation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. member across for the very important question.

I, unfortunately as I alluded to earlier, I was not able to attend that public forum last night. I had another obligation related directly to my portfolio with health and wellness.

With regards to the conversation around what's happening as we forward, those discussions are being lined up as we speak. As a matter of fact, I have a meeting scheduled, along with the Premier for Monday, along with the mayors of Charlottetown, Stratford, and Cornwall. That is one of the top agenda items that we will be discussing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: It was clear from the feedback provided at the public meeting last night that the majority of those favouring regulated the units listed on sites such as Airbnb and Vrbo wanted an owner-occupied model. That would mean in order to rent out on one of those sites the unit would also have to be your primary residence.

Currently in PEI, short-term rentals are required to be licensed under the *Tourism Industry Act*. These regulations exist to protect the interests of tourists; however, no provincial regulations on short-term rentals exist to protect our housing supply, and the interests of Island tenants.

A question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: What kind of regulation do you think is appropriate for short-term rentals?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do thank the member for putting the question forward.

Certainly as I have said before, any family, if we have one family, if we have one individual that does not have a roof over their heads, we have a housing crisis and we certainly have that situation right now.

Having said that though, we do need to work, we have to work with our municipalities right across the province as the hon. minister referenced here just a couple minutes ago. We do need to work with our municipalities.

The needs in the Greater Charlottetown or the Charlottetown area are not necessarily the same as they are in Summerside or about the same as they are in West Prince. When I say the needs, it means the solutions as well are not necessarily the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some municipalities seem reluctant to act, with the notable exception of the town of Victoria by the Sea, and are looking to the province to provide solutions, solutions that are required urgently.

Protection for Islanders for housing

Minister, will your department step up and develop the necessary regulations to protect the rights of Islanders who need a secure, long-term place to live?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It would be about a week and a half ago that I had the great opportunity to attend an event right here in Charlottetown: tent city. It was

coordinated by the PEI Fight for Affordable Housing.

I had a tremendous opportunity – it was a great opportunity that day to speak to the organizer, Mr. Jason Aylward, but not only to Jason, but also the ones that are living this day in and day out.

That's the type of thing like I had mentioned a minute ago, that certainly we have to have the discussions with municipalities, but we have to collaborate. I am the type of person I am not going – I would much prefer to collaborate as to dictate what should be taking place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Other jurisdictions have required short-term rental hosting platforms, like Airbnb, to enter into information sharing agreements so that government has accurate data upon which it can formulate good public policy.

Short-term rental hosting platforms

A question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Will your government commit to perusing such agreements with hosting platforms?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I do appreciate the question from the hon. member and I do appreciate her passion. I share with her, with regard to the housing situation, let's face it, the housing crisis that we are presently facing. Short term rentals are no doubt a very important issue. With that as my colleague had mentioned earlier, the provincial departments that are impacted that have a say in this, that have a role to play in this, are working collaboratively and in discussions with regard to long-term solutions, but also working with municipalities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While I appreciate that the minister is new to the portfolio as are all members of the House, this problem is not a new problem, it has in fact been brewing for months, if not years, and is a significant aspect of the current housing crisis. I am pleased to hear that the minister is using that language to recognize the situation that Islanders are in and that those discussions are ongoing with the municipalities who are obviously a key player in this. But again, minister, the time for discussion and consultation is well passed.

Regulations for short-term rentals

Minister, will your department make a commitment to developing regulations to restrict the currently unregulated growth of short-term rentals across the province?

Speaker: Minister of Social Development and Housing:

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to reiterate that I'm not the type of individual who is going to dictate. Having said that, I do appreciate where the hon. member is coming from, that regulations most likely do need to be put in place. But having said that, we do need to work in collaboration, we do need to listen to our municipal leaders, we do need to listen to the ones who are living this on a day in day out basis and take our action, our movement, our decisions based on that Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member of Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Clifford Lee's role in short-term rental file

Last year the province appointed Clifford Lee as the special advisor on housing. A question to the Minister on Social Development and Housing: Can you elaborate on what Mr. Lee's role has been

on a short-term rental file in the almost year that he's been employed.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Clifford Lee is under my department. I had a couple of meetings with him to discuss the housing file. He brought forward what he has been working on, the projects that have been presented to him, the projects that they are looking at and at this point, it's like the minister said, we're working to get this housing problem solved and Clifford Lee is a part of that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

I don't view climate change as an environmental issue at all. It's a security issue and in fact, it's the gravest security issue that humanity has ever faced. The throne speech essentially acknowledges this in saying climate change poses severe threats to and I quote "...our coast lines, our crops and the lives of future generations of Islanders..."

The following sentence in the throne speech says this: government's long term vision is to achieve a carbon neutral society.

Carbon neutral by 2050

A question to the premier, now that our National Parliament has established that it is appropriate to refer to our situation as a climate emergency and if we accept that the Paris targets are scientifically established goals necessary to keep global heating to less than 1.5 degrees, does he mean by long-term, that we will be carbon neutral by 2050?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker for the question.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition is exactly right. Climate change is probably the issue that is facing us today and also facing those

that are coming behind us. In the throne speech we tried to articulate the seriousness of this. As a government, we've appointed a department of climate change for that reason. The Paris targets that are set from 2015, we are working towards meeting those targets by 2030.

That won't get us to carbon neutrality, as the leader of the opposition knows. It would be my desire as it would be the desire of every other member of this House and every other member or resident of Prince Edward Island to get there much sooner.

I think as we can continue to evolve as a society, as we continue to innovate, as we continue to learn more about how we can go about reducing our carbon footprint, reducing greenhouse gases, I feel confident that we can get there sooner. But, we also have to have some, what I like to say, common sense and some reasoned approach to this and 2050 is a target that is very reachable. I do sincerely hope we can get there sooner.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The current legislation under which we work, the *Climate Leadership Act*, on the trajectory that it puts us on, we will not be carbon neutral until 2065 – 15 years after the Paris Accord says we have to be at carbon neutral.

Once again, in the throne speech there is a section where our youth here on Prince Edward Island are described as our teachers when it comes to climate change, and that we must, and again I quote: listen to their voices.

Climate change re: concern to young Islanders

To the Premier: Has he heard any voices from younger Islanders who have suggested that we should be less concerned about climate change and that a more gradual approach is what they would prefer?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, in response to that question, I would say absolutely not.

I think the vision going forward for Prince Edward Island and for the world is going to come from our youth.

I have a 12-year-old son, a 15-year-old daughter who are very, very passionate about making sure we do our part for the environment and to leave this place better than what we found it. It is an issue that all youth, I think, are very conscious of and are really driving us to make sure that we get it and move forward.

So the answer to your question would be: No.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the problems when we talk about climate change is having to admit that fixing it is going to cost us. It's going to cost us plenty. There is no free fix.

The choice with the biggest cost is in-action. All other options must be weighed against each other by asking the following three questions:

By how much is it going to reduce carbon emissions? How much is that going to cost? How does that compare to the other alternatives that are available to us?

Cost of options to reduce emissions

To the Premier: Is he in favour of adopting, for Prince Edward Island, the most effective, cheapest options to reduce emissions?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I see my role as the Premier of Prince Edward Island to come up with reasonable and doable options to actually help us get there. The one question that wasn't asked in the three by the Leader of the Opposition is: How do we do it now and what are the impacts if we do that now?

It is irresponsible to do that without looking at that, and it's real that we have to look at what – there are costs that are associated with that. Yes, there are costs on the back end if we don't get there, but there are costs now that we have to be mindful of.

The Leader of the Opposition and I had a couple of really spirited debates during the election campaign, and this was one of the issues that we mostly agree on but we found a little bit of room to wiggle and discuss. I think it is responsible for Prince Edward Island to make sure that we're doing everything we can to reduce the carbon, but we also have to be aware of who is here right now, and there's a cost that goes with that that we have to make sure we don't download too much on.

I think we can do a lot more by innovating. I think we can do a lot more by rewarding Islanders for being mindful and to actually reduce carbon. That is the approach that I have been wanting to take, but I want to get there, hon. leader – I want to get there as fast as possible. I absolutely do, yes.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: The Premier talks of reasonable – it is unreasonable for us not to be facing this crisis absolutely head on, but to do it in a way that takes into account; absolutely, the hardships that will be endured by this generation. But, this generation has created a terrible mess here on this planet and it is our responsibility not to pass that mess on to future generations.

In combating climate change and assessing the costs associated with it, one critical factor, as we have just agreed, is protecting every-day Islanders who are alive today from those extra costs.

To the Premier: Of the choices that are available; more regulation, carbon taxation, incentives, rebates, penalizing big emitters, tax credits and on and on, which does he believe will create the least economic burden for Islanders who are here today?

Or, put another way, as it states in your throne speech: which will be the ideas and solutions that work for everyone?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope that the way forward is found in all of those, quite frankly. I think there's something to be found in all of those components that the Leader of the Opposition has put forward.

Where we differ on a carbon tax is yes, I do believe the science. I do believe that carbon pricing is one of the best ways to change how we operate as Islanders. I believe that.

I believe in it wholeheartedly, but I also have been very adamant in saying that the biggest challenge with Prince Edward Island when it comes to greenhouse gas is transportation. Everything that we export is by transportation. Everyone who lives in rural Prince Edward Island has to get places by driving a car.

I think it's unfair to download all of those costs onto us right now, because it absolutely does nothing to change what the reality is. I want to live in the reality. Let's reduce carbon. We agree we need to reduce carbon. We need to be a leader on that.

I think as Islanders we're leaders and innovators on that. There are more things that we could do, absolutely, but penalizing people for living and working in rural Prince Edward Island is not something that I want to do right now.

I want to work with them. I would rather incentivize Islanders to live there. I would rather find a way move forward and actually reduce carbon to get to the levels that we need to get to as outlined in the Paris Accord of 2015.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Farming is critically important to our economy and right now Island farmers are facing increasingly severe challenges due to the effects of climate change. We have seen this over the last couple of years with significant crop failures due to abnormal weather, which has put extraordinary pressure on crop insurance programs.

Cost incurred through crop insurance re: severe weather

Question to the minister responsible for agriculture: Can you advise this House on the total costs incurred through crop insurance as a result of last year's severe weather?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, hon. member, thank you for that question.

Yes, I can give you some details on the crop insurance. I mean the potato industry had a difficult fall, difficult spring. These don't happen very often, but they got a double whammy last year; and the devastating effects of not getting their crop out and a light frost in the spring it led to trigger the crop insurance.

It was approximately \$53 million from the crop insurance, which is federal insurance money.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

\$53 million is an extraordinary amount to payout in one year.

Unpredictable weather patterns are a reality with climate change, and the longer we continue to dump carbon into the atmosphere, the less stable our climate becomes. As members can see we are already paying the costs of inaction and those costs can reasonably be expected to increase substantially as we approach or exceed 1.5 degrees of warming. This is one small example of costs, but it's far from the only one.

Question to the minister responsible for agriculture: Do you have any concerns that multiple growing seasons like last year could impact the ability of crop insurance programs to stay viable?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you for the question, Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

As a farmer, I also purchase crop insurance every year and I have only had triggered a large payment once in my – I guess I have been farming since '94. It happens, and we are so fortunate that the farmers have that insurance program there so when they have a year like last year they can take advantage of it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Talking about mitigation when it comes to farming is critical and in agriculture a strong adaptation plan will be necessary as even if we cut emissions to zero today we can reasonably expect to see warming continue for some time.

Ensuring a viable future in farming

Question to the minister responsible for agriculture: Can you advise the House on any steps you are taking to ensure a viable future in farming can be sustained with our new climate reality?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: My department, the Department of Agriculture and Land, are taking great strides in preserving the quality of the soil. We are doing a new soil test that takes measurements of the soil so you can measure the organic matter. We are investing in technology like never before where it helps the farmers preserve the land.

Also, precision agriculture is a big word that I'm using now in pushing forward to farmers across this Island that we need to – precision is a key word on preserving everything and using only what we need.

The farmers, myself and farmers across this Island, take great pride in their land and in their environment. They make their money, they make their livelihood, their families

live off the land and they care about their land.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During the past campaign this spring, the PC platform had stated they would give \$3.3 million, additional dollars, to long-term care. But yet, there was no mention of this in the throne speech.

Plans for long-term care in this fiscal year

So my question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Can you give the House today some information on what your plan is for long-term care, specifically in this fiscal?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This certainly was in our platform and long-term care is extremely important to this government, unfortunately the past administration, when they replaced three manors: the Prince Edward Home, the manor in Montague and the manor in Tyne-Valley, they built those facilities with the same amount of beds they were replacing.

While I applaud the former administration for taking measures to replace those facilities, they didn't have the foresight to look forward and to realize that we have an aging demographic and we were going to require more beds.

The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche spoke in his member statement with regards to a great investment that we announced recently with regards to adding 12 beds in the Wellington area, in Chez-Nous.

I mean, we have a budget, it will be forthcoming and at that point in time, I'll be able to share exact details of what our plans are moving forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your first supplementary.

Mr. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It was the last government that actually allocated those beds to Chez-Nous in Wellington, along with – or included 100 beds last year of long-term care right across the Island.

However, there is a huge need for long-term beds in my community, in the community of Tignish.

Need for long-term care beds in Tignish

We have a 52 bed community care facility that's a co-operative and we're very proud of that, but their ask now is to have an allocation of at least 12 long-term care beds in our community.

Will you make this a priority in your allocation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I recently have had a conversation electronically with a member of that co-op and I agree with the hon. member, that it is a wonderful facility. I've actually been up to Tignish and I've seen the facility several times before and I applaud the great work that this co-op is doing. I applaud the work that they've been able to do in the community care facility to help with long-term care as well.

One of the discussions that we had when we were going back and forth was apparently a commitment by the previous administration that we're still trying to track down and an invoice apparently for two hundred and some thousand dollars that was promised that would be paid, that we're still trying to track down that information so we have something in writing so we can go back and actually evaluate it and come to a conclusion one way or another.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your second supplementary.

Mr. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

What the minister just mentioned, I'll go back to the board and I'll find out that information for you because it's all news to me, but I will be speaking with the board at 5:00 p.m. and I'll get back to you with an update on that.

So would you be willing to – you've been through the facility several times you said – in your capacity now as Minister of Health and Wellness, tour the facility, meet the board and while you're also in Tignish go through the health centre and see what services that they provide and they also have an ask and a need in our community and they would love to have the opportunity to have a sit down with you and discuss their needs.

Would you be willing to do that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Land and land ownership has always been a contentious issue here on Prince Edward Island and an issue of importance to Islanders since our first settlers arrived here many hundreds of years ago.

The throne speech and the PC election platform has identified the concept of a land bank –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Henderson: – the previous administration had a concept of a farmland financing program and this program was established to provide opportunity for farmers to actually own their land and to build equity in their farming operations.

My question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Land: Will the minister provide the House with a detailed schedule to when farmers can expect this bank will be in operation and will the farm land financing program be discontinued when the land bank is operational.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and member from, I believe, District 25.

As a person who farms and owns farm land and went through the Future Farmer Program myself, I know the importance of having access to financial needs, access to land and (Indistinct) the farmland financing program it did do that, it financed young farmers or expanding farmers or farmers in that aspect.

But for the land bank, we want to take it and look at it that. We want to do something different; we wanted to take the land that can go up for sale and nobody is interested. It's across the Island and we want more of an uptake. I looked at the numbers from before and only 13 loans were issued from across the Island in farmland financing. So we want to take a different approach, a different look with the farmland.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, first supplementary.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously the minister would know that a land bank can come in many forms and it can help to preserve our traditional agricultural sector and help maintain viability of our Island farms.

As I understand it, land banks can be private sector or public sector entities and as the throne speech is rather vague, I am sort of seeking some greater clarification of this.

Viability of family farms and new entrants

Does the government have any preference, or the minister have any preference, as to an organizational model that will be used and in the ministers view, which model will best

preserve the viability of family farms and encourage new entrants into our agriculture community?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I'll answer this as the land bank does fall inside the department of transportation, as all land acquisition does for the government.

We're in the very early stages; this is something that's very important to this government. I know the Premier gave directive like: let's get this thing going. I met with staff, we talked about it, we're exploring what the options are, so the timing of your question couldn't have been better.

If you want to be a part of the discussion, I know you have a lot of experience as the minister of agriculture, I know you have a lot of experience as a farmer and any insight that you can provide, we're going to be open to that because we're not designing this for us that sit over here, we're designing this for all of Prince Edward Island, for the future, for faring in the future and for our children. So the door is open and we're looking forward to anything you can provide to help us.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, your second supplementary.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's encouraging to know that that's actually the preference (Indistinct) going to be acquiring the land, it'll be interesting to see who's actually administrating the land and determining how that particular land bank operation works.

In the PC Party platform, it was mentioned that there was a cost of about \$1million that was going to be assigned to this particular land bank. I'm sure the minister of agriculture is well aware of the value of land in his community.

Amount of acres in land bank

Minister, can you explain to this House what this money will actually be spent on – and if

it is the minister of transportation that's good – and if it for the purchase of land, how many acres would that put into such a land bank.

Speaker: The hon. –

Mr. Henderson: Give all three that's good!

Some Hon. Members: Indistinct.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well no, Mr. Speaker, I feel since I'm the rightly or wrongly the architect of this plan that you continue to – you might want to flip it over and look to the back to some of these things – but there's lots more in it in there, of course.

The idea for this was to actually put \$1 million forward to start to formulate what exactly a land bank would look like. We want to explore as we talked about on the campaign with other party leaders, what that could be. Whether there's some private investment option, whether there's a public investment option, all of those other things.

We obviously know that \$1million is not going to buy much agriculture land in Prince Edward Island so we will have to be utilizing more resources going forward and how we go about doing that. I hope the plan would be to send this to the standing committee on agriculture or whenever that committee gets made up, I would like the recommendation to come from this Legislature and from Prince Edward Island as to how we actually put that forward.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My questions today are for the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

There is significant concern in my district with the Sorrey Bridge which is located Knox's Dam. Some of the concerns to do with this are through the bridge's structural integrity.

Inspection and age of Sorrey Bridge

Can the minister confirm how old this bridge is and when the bridge was last inspected?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Mr. MacEwen: Good question.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am familiar with this bridge. Back in the old days, I'm sure the Premier might have been there, some afternoons that he was supposed to be in high school we used to swim off of there in hot days like today when we should have been in school, but it's been there for a long time.

I can't tell you the exact age of the bridge, but I do know that the bridges are inspected in two-year cycles so it would have been inspected no more than two years ago.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This bridge is heavily travelled. Hundreds of cars travel over it every day. School buses travel over it with children, dozens of school buses every day.

Minister: What did the most recent bridge inspection find out about this structure?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's no question this bridge is old. It's one of the wooden structures that we still have. It is highly travelled. It is in very bad shape on the surface, for sure, it's rough. I believe the inspections found that it was in fair condition, which isn't the worst rating that we give bridges, but it's not the best rating obviously either.

We have a budget of about \$1.5 million a year that we use to repair bridges, and we have a budget of between five and \$7 million a year of capital budget to replace bridges. So I feel like we've done a good job in the department keeping up.

This was the first year that we released the inspections report to the public, so anybody can go look at it and decide for themselves how they think that we're doing. This is something we're going to continue to do so that all Islanders can grade us on how we're doing with bridges on PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, your second supplementary.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can assure you, the bridge is not in fair condition. It's extremely poor. Perhaps, 20 years ago.

Replacement of Sorrey Bridge

Minister, will you commit to replacing this bridge and make it a priority so all traffic, including school buses, can travel over it safely?

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is in our capital plan. It's in our five-year capital plan. I'm not sure of the year. It's not this summer, for sure. Our bridges have all been announced –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I don't even think it's next year, but you know what, hon. member? If you want to sit down and look at the priorities that are in your district and want us to shift things around to get that bridge done before something else, then I am more than happy to get it bumped up the list for you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Even if we stay under 1.5 degrees of warming, which we must, our climate reality is going to be substantially different from the past.

Temperature and rainfall patterns are changing and the range of what is able to survive here will change with it. We can expect to see trees; plants, wildlife and crops that have historically thrived here do so no longer.

Direction for sustainable agriculture for the future

Question to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries: What information is your department using to assess what direction agriculture needs to be moving in to be sustainable in the future?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, thank you for the question.

The Department of Agriculture and Land is taking great strides to improve the sustainability of agriculture and the soil, and we have a department of sustainability in the department and we're continuing to go to add to that as well.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question was specifically around what information are you using and where you're getting that information from.

UPEI's climate lab has made some excellent recommendations, one of which is to commission a study that would provide evidence for future decision-making with regards to which directions we take in agriculture. I'll be tabling a copy of those recommendations later today.

Study of crop opportunities and challenges

Question to the Minister of Agriculture and Land: Will you commit to commissioning a comprehensive study of crop opportunities and challenges under warming conditions under the next 30 years?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, hon. member, we take all considerations in and for the betterment of the soil, the farmer. We will be looking at different things as they come and we will continue to.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our current *Electric Power Act* allows a certain return on the portion of grid assets. The utility is allowed to own currently at least 40% of the total. This system does not encourage innovation as any potential losses are absorbed by the utility, but any returns over the determined rate on a return must be returned to rate payers.

This encourages the utility to use only status quo assets, which they consider to be low risk, such as diesel generators. There is no incentive for the utility to take any sort of risk and drive our grid infrastructure towards the innovation we need to get to the energy future we want.

Electric Power Act

Question to the minister: Do you agree that it is time to have a closer look at the *Electric Power Act* and ensure it works, both for the public utility and the people of Prince Edward Island's collective future?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I do.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Formerly we had a cost plus 10% arrangement in place that was making it difficult for the utility to make a profit selling NB Power's electricity, so we changed it. Now we have essentially guaranteed returns, in other words charge

what you need to make a certain amount of profit.

Is the minister willing to explore alternative models for how we ensure Maritime Electric is both profitable and encouraged to innovate?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Mr. Myers: Yes, Mr. Speaker, absolutely I am.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The PEI Power Corporation now has the ability to control demand at the source with behind the metre storage, potentially electric vehicle storage, smart appliances, and small-scale renewables. Islanders want many of these innovative technologies in their homes and businesses as they provide economic benefits and security against power outages, as well providing a path towards household greenhouse gas emission reduction.

Transitioning energy supply to carbon free

Will the minister be working to find ways to immediately encourage the participation of Island homeowners in transitioning our energy supply to carbon free local energy sources?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So the hon. member and I have had a couple conversations about this – one formal, one informal.

I believe strongly in helping Islanders shift over for how they use energy and how much energy they use. In the Office of Energy Efficiency they have programs that help along with that and they have expertise that helps along with that.

Our platform that some of you like to talk about a lot here lately. Our platform had in it that there was going to be a solar rebate

program to help Islanders to get into solar rebate or to get into solar energy in their homes.

That is something that we are going to move forward on because I think it's important.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Effective public engagement will be important to creating a new system that works for the people of PEI.

Electric Power Act (further)

Will the minister commit to striking a committee on how to best to revise the *Electric Power Act* to ensure the utility, the government, and most importantly, the people are motivated to move into the 100% clean energy future that PEI wants and needs.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know if I would strike a new committee, but we will soon have or maybe we already do have committees of the House that will deal with those types of things. That's probably a great place for committee work. The committee can do what they like with it, take it to the public, take it to any community they want, and report back to the House. I would absolutely love to be a partner in the results of that committee to decide that that was the best avenue for it.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Oh, I'm sorry.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My colleagues have spoken to the devastating effects of climate change on our Island. All eyes are on us, and I for one, want to look my own children in the eye and tell them I did everything I could to protect them. I just hope that it's not too late. Our

Island schools are the best place to reach youth and children.

Teaching of climate change in Island schools

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning and Environment, Water, and Climate Change: Are you comfortable what we are teaching in terms of climate change in our Island schools is adequate?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning and Minister of Environment, Water, and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, that's an issue that has been raised a number of times, most recently by the youth that were having a Friday Futures Climate Change strike over here at Province House. They suggested things like having environmental fairs, both science and heritage fairs with environmental themes, or an environmental fair itself.

They also said that there used to be an environmental studies program that was offered in the schools, and in fact it was their belief it was classified in the arts as an arts credit. Immediately, of course, I looked into that and I do have a document that outlines exactly what is being shared in our schools in terms of curriculum right now.

I've asked the department to look at that for the future, I would say in terms of timelines, it won't be until the fall until we would be able to give you anything but I'll gladly share that document with you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are many barriers that they have identified in the New Brunswick document that talks exactly, I was going to bring up that exact Envirothon and the experiential learning that they do in New Brunswick they've integrated into their curriculum.

In this document they identify many barriers that teachers face in the implementation of something like this.

Some of these include but are not limited to a fear on the part of teachers that this topic will upset parents and teachers. Some teachers have a lack of connection to the environment, lack of classroom materials, resources, professional development, peer mentoring and or community support.

Barriers to teachers attempting to educate on climate change

How will you support teachers in addressing these barriers should they choose to address climate change on their own?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Mr. Trivers: You know, this is a great question and a timely question.

We've got some really excellent in the department who are experts in developing curriculum and one of the areas they've been looking at recently is what they call an inquiry-based approach.

They are taking the leaders in science and social studies and other subject areas, not just the literacy and math, but all those other areas and they're saying: Let's take a coordinated approach to that. That's something I think we should bring to them because that's exactly how we could address some of the fears of teachers, by integrating the curriculum across those areas including something on the environment and climate change within that.

[End of Question Period]