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# Open Cabinet

## Open Cabinet Transcripts



### TRANSCRIPT OF THE OPEN CABINET MEETING May 31, 2003

Province of British Columbia  
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Premier and President of the Executive Council  
 Minister of State for Intergovernmental Relations  
 Deputy Premier and Minister of Children and Family Development  
 Minister of Advanced Education  
 Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries  
 Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Treaty Negotiations  
 Minister of State for Early Childhood Development  
 Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services  
 Minister of State for Women's and Seniors' Services  
 Minister of Education  
 Minister of Energy and Mines  
 Minister of Finance  
 Minister of Forests  
 Minister of State for Mining  
 Minister of Health Services  
 Minister of State for Mental Health and Addiction Services  
 Minister of Human Resources  
 Minister of Management Services  
 Minister of Provincial Revenue  
 Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General  
 Minister of Skills Development and Labour  
 Minister of Small Business and Economic Development  
 Minister of Sustainable Resource Management  
 Minister of State for Resort Development  
 Minister of Transportation  
 Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection

Hon. Gordon Campbell  
 Hon. Sindi Hawkins  
 Hon. Christy Clark  
 Hon. Shirley Bond  
 Hon. John van Dongen  
 Hon. Geoff Plant  
 Hon. Linda Reid  
 Hon. Murray Coell  
 Hon. Ida Chong  
 Hon. Tom Christensen  
 Hon. Richard Neufeld  
 Hon. Gary Collins  
 Hon. Michael de Jong  
 Hon. Roger Harris  
 Hon. Colin Hansen  
 Hon. Susan Brice  
 Hon. Stan Hagen  
 Hon. Joyce Murray  
 Hon. Rick Thorpe  
 Hon. Rich Coleman  
 Hon. Graham Bruce  
 Hon. John Les  
 Hon. George Abbott  
 Hon. Sandy Santori  
 Hon. Kevin Falcon  
 Hon. Bill Barisoff

### MONDAY, MAY 31, 2004

The cabinet met at 2:02 p.m.

#### Premier's Opening Remarks

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Okay. We have a number of items on the agenda today, mostly for information to bring people up to date on some of the actions that have been taken over the last number of months to get us prepared for the coming summer. Let me start by giving you a quick review of what took place over the weekend.

For the first time that we're aware of, we brought together Finance ministers and Health ministers from all of the territories and all of the provinces. Premier McGuinty and I chaired the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to carry on with what the Council of the Federation has done in terms of building a long-term strategy for securing our health care system for Canadians, regardless of where they live.

I think it was a very effective meeting. We were talking about some of the reforms that have taken place across the country over the last two to three years. We were training literally thousands of new nurses in the provinces over the last two to three years. As you know, in British Columbia there are over 2,000 new nursing positions that are available. That was a strategy that Premiers embraced in the year 2000, and we've carried it out, certainly since we were elected

in 2001.

We also had a chance to meet with some first nations representatives, aboriginal, Métis and Inuit representatives prior to that meeting. I will be meeting with those first nations, Inuit and Métis people again, probably prior to the end of this month. It is clear that the federal government has got to assume their responsibilities with regard to aboriginal health care. It's interesting. The feds will tell us, on the one hand, to make sure that we get information on what's happening in terms of our services, but it is the federal department that has failed to actually deliver the same level of accountability for aboriginal people.

We want to be sure that there is a comprehensive strategy to deal with aboriginal health. I think it's important to recognize that provinces deliver health. The feds can certainly contract with the various provinces to deliver the health that's needed in those jurisdictions, but we do have to start really bridging the gap, the service gap that aboriginal people have experienced over the last number of years. That's one of the initiatives that we will undertake. We have asked first nations, aboriginal, Métis and Inuit people to put together a comprehensive approach that they will look at. I'll be talking with Phil Fontaine within this week to discuss when we'll meet next, but that's a critical part of what we want to do.

**[2:05]**

We also established a number of working groups. There will be a human resource working group to look at training needs, education needs, human resource needs across the provinces and territories, and Colin Hansen will be leading that up. Colin will also be dealing with pharmaceuticals. Those are two of the largest cost drivers we have in health care - pharmaceuticals and human resources. There's no question that if we keep our economies moving ahead though, we can keep up with these demands, but it's essential that you have those things in balance. One of the great things about this meeting on the weekend is that we did have the Health ministers and Finance ministers working together with regard to that. Colin will be leading that up.

It is important, I think, for Canadians to remember when you look at the Canada Health Act - and we talk about universality, accessibility, public administration, comprehensiveness and portability.... It is important to recognize that every part of the country doesn't have the same level of service, the same opportunity for service, the same quality of service. It was pointed out by one of the Inuit representatives that we met with that, candidly, when they hear a diagnosis of cancer, they pretty much figure they're pretty close to the end, whereas in the southern part of the country we have had some very significant successes in dealing with cancer. The same cancer drug regimes are not available across the country. The same sort of catastrophic drugs, if you want, or very expensive drugs are not available across the country.

We want to try and see - as provinces who are charged with the responsibility of delivering those health services to Canadians - how we can really close those gaps. There are service gaps that exist. There are a number of challenges we face. The working group on pharmaceuticals will look at some of those issues.

We also have a working group that's been established on home care, intermediate care funding and how that works - again, in different jurisdictions, totally different responses, totally different programmatic responses. We have to be aware of those.

Telehealth and Infoway Canada. It's interesting. Infoway Canada has been in existence for four years. It's had four separate CEOs. It really has not been able to accomplish much of its early promise. In Nunavut where they have - just think of this - 25 communities, 30,000 people and no roads, telehealth is an incredibly important part of accessing health care for those communities. There's a great deal that they have done already, but we believe that by working together with the Northwest Territories, the Yukon, Nunavut, and Newfoundland and Labrador, we can create, if you want, a service framework that will meet the needs of people in the north of Canada. We've charged our working group with going off and doing that. That will be led by Nunavut in terms of telehealth, and Alberta will be leading the initiative, the working group initiative, on electronic health records. They've done some significant work there, and that will be helpful to us as well.

The issue of accessibility was also discussed, often short-handed to wait-lists. Saskatchewan has done some really excellent work with regard to wait-lists - how we properly manage wait-lists, how we find a common definition for wait-lists. You probably are aware that the four western provinces have already initiated, sort of, a lot of common work on that. Saskatchewan will be leading the group on accessibility for us as we lead to the Western Premiers' Conference in the beginning of July and the Atlantic Premiers' conference in the beginning of July. Eventually there will be a Council of the Federation meeting at the end of July where all of this will be brought together.

There's another, I think, important point to note. There's been a lot of discussion, and we're pleased - I think all of the provinces are pleased - that each federal party has embraced health care as a critical issue that we have to confront. We have obviously all said for some time that there is a major funding gap as well. We have to recognize the opportunities for growth in funding at the federal level. The average for provinces is about 40 per cent of provincial budgets right now being used for health care. In British Columbia, as you know, it's higher than that, and in some places a little lower. But on average, it's about 40 per cent. At the federal level it's less than 10 per cent.

Clearly, there's a lot of room there for decisions on where we will - where Canadians will - request federal parties to put their priorities as we move together. I think it's encouraging that all the federal parties have said they want to establish a new partnership. We should know that the foundation for that new partnership is going to be a funding partnership that allows the provinces to deliver the services in the way that they must to meet the needs of their citizens. I think it's critical to remember this.

**[2:10]**

There have been an awful lot of innovations that have taken place at the provincial level. The idea of innovation is not something that comes from the federal government down. It's actually something that comes from the ground floor up, and we've seen lots of innovations at the provincial level which deliver better care to people, regardless of which province they're living in.

The critical thing as we look at this, though, is that if you want a real foundation for the future, you have to find a financial foundation that creates stability for what we do today. One of the things that we have to all watch as we look forward is: how do we provide that critical financial footing for long-term funding? How do you provide predictability into it? How do you know how we're going to be dealing with inflationary pressures, aging pressures, etc.? We have also asked our Finance ministers who have done a first draft of a very, I think, comprehensive paper on a funding formula to come back with a paper based on some founding principles.

You'll notice that an awful lot of the announcements that are made on health are about one-time funding as opposed to permanent funding, or they're buying changes in the system as opposed to providing support for the current system. We think it's important that we let the federal government understand exactly what is required to sustain the existing system and, if we want to expand the system, what will be required to expand that system - recognizing always that it's the provinces who deliver health care.

I'll let Colin say what he wishes to at the end of this, but I do think that's a critical part of the federation - that we have a federation, in fact, that allows for different places to deliver health care in different ways. The critical issue is how you deliver those services properly. That's what we're trying to move forward through.

It was a breakthrough meeting in this regard. People were working together, and they were learning from one another. I think there is a real prospect for some real breakthroughs in terms of both the funding partnership and the partnership for bridging the service gaps that currently exist.

There was one presentation that pointed out that the last truly comprehensive look at these issues was carried out in 1977. It takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of give and take. It takes an open mind to be able to sit down at the table and learn from one another. It takes, I think, a recognition of what we're doing well and some of the things that we have challenges with.

I was encouraged by the meeting. Both Gary and Colin were there, and they're welcome to make any comments that they wish. I just should let you know that we will be continuing to push this.

I must admit that I learned a lot from the meeting, from the presentations that we had from around the table. As we learn that, I think we are able to create a solid foundation that will allow us to provide health care security for people. People want to know there will be health care there for their families, whether their kids or whether their parents. We have a lot of work to provide that security to people, but I do believe it's within reach.

Just so you know, the timing is that the working groups will be reporting out at the end of next month, the end of June. There will be meetings and discussions at both the Western Premiers and the Atlantic Premiers. Ontario and Quebec will discuss it amongst themselves, I guess - their individual provinces. There will be a subsequent meeting for the Council of the Federation, and it's hoped that regardless of the outcome of the federal election, there will then be a first ministers' meeting that will be more than a three-hour meeting. It will take some time.

It think it is important, too, that this was a meeting that took place over two days. It wasn't a meeting that we arrived at, had a discussion and talked about what the communiqué was. We talked about what we were trying to do and how we were trying to do it and what we could learn from one another. I thought it was a productive meeting that way.

Colin, I'll let you pick up on anything that you'd like to add.

Gary, you're fine?

So go ahead, Colin.

**Hon. C. Hansen:** Okay. Thanks, Premier.

I guess, first of all, it wasn't our first choice of a place to spend a weekend - locked in a conference room and, least of all, in Toronto. As much as everybody came to that meeting perhaps not knowing how much we could really accomplish in that kind of a setting, I think everybody left enthusiastic about what we had accomplished over the two days. You know, those are.... If you look at all of the provinces and territories, you've got all political stripes represented in that room, and yet what was amazing was the commonality of interest.

**[2:15]**

There's been a lot of discussion over the last couple of years about the need for health reform if we're really going to have a sustainable health care system that's going to meet the needs into the future. One of the frustrations, I think, that the provinces and territories have had is that they've embarked on health reform, and there's been a lot of phenomenal work that's been done across Canada at the provincial and territorial level towards reforming the system. There were a couple of things that came out that I was impressed with over the course of the two days.

First of all was some of the excellent work that's being done in other provinces. The Premier mentioned the wait-lists - for example, the wait-list project in Saskatchewan. If you look at electronic health records and electronic prescribing

initiatives that are underway in Alberta, if you look at things like the cardiac care network strategies they have in Ontario, the lifestyle and healthy living initiatives they have in the Atlantic provinces - you know, these are all tremendous initiatives that really are going to help reform the system.

What was important, I think, is that we all approached this from a context that we can learn from each other and find out where the successes are in Canada so that the other jurisdictions can, in fact, copy those successes.

The other thing I came away with was a real sense of pride in what we have been able to accomplish in British Columbia, because we are considered leaders in Canada when it comes to chronic disease management. Conditions like congestive heart failure and diabetes are the two that we've already rolled out, and there are several other initiatives that are in the works now to make sure that people get managed in a primary care level rather than waiting until they get so sick they've got to be admitted to a hospital. We've had phenomenal success in a collaboration that involves the B.C. Medical Association, the pharmaceutical companies, the various not-for-profit associations, the health authorities. It is seen across Canada as a real success story.

The other one is around the rollout of our Fair Pharmacare system and our approach to managing the very rapidly rising costs of pharmaceuticals. Again, B.C. is considered to be a leader in all of Canada in that area. Another one was around the consolidation of services that we've done in the province, building centres of excellence in each region so that people can get access to better specialist care in the region where they live. That also is being watched from other jurisdictions, and they're looking at copying those initiatives.

The other thing that was important was the approach we've taken to health authorities, where we streamlined from 52 health authorities to the six we have in place today. Again, there are several provinces looking at that experience and figuring that B.C. probably has it right. We are leaders in a lot of areas, and at the same time, we can learn from areas where other provinces and territories are, in fact, leaders.

It was a great weekend, and I think everybody left enthusiastic about the task that's ahead of us - to really map out a blueprint for health care reform that builds on the existing strengths we have at the provincial and territorial level.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Any questions? Okay.

#### **For Information: Emergency Communications**

**Hon. G. Campbell:** The first item.... Sorry, just so people know, the agenda today will cover off the emergency communications that we have been developing since last summer; a follow-up on the Filmon report so people know where we stand with regard to that; there will be a 2004 drought preparation report from Bill. Sorry, the first two items are going to be by Rich, and then the last will be an information update on the avian flu situation with John and Rich.

Let me start this second item by saying that when I first flew up to the McLure fire in Kamloops last year, there was obviously lots of concern. There was concern from people who had heard prior to the weekend that their homes were going to be burnt down in Barriere. They then heard that their homes hadn't burned down. They were then concerned about which homes had and had not burnt down.

There was a fairly considerable amount of concern and - let me see how I would describe this - constructive criticism from the media about what was taking place in terms of providing information. I do think there are lots of times when we think about what doesn't work with the media, but we should know this. In terms of the emergencies last summer, the media was one of the most important tools we had - the broadcast media, particularly, around the clock.

CHNL in Kamloops was broadcasting around the clock trying to tell people what was going on. We found the same thing took place in Kelowna. The broadcasters across the province were trying to make sure that people got information. So fairly quickly we had a discussion about how we just.... I understood what the challenges were that a lot of the staff people had with regard to what they could put out and what they couldn't.

There had been some pretty significant horror stories of wrong information being delivered to wrong families. Imagine how you'd feel as a family when you're told your house has burnt down, only to discover that it hasn't or, even worse, to know your house hasn't burnt down, only to discover that it has. It really increases an awful lot of that concern. People want to know what to do, when to do it, where to go, why to get there, etc.

**[2:20]**

I thought there was a real improvement. Certainly, I heard back from a lot of the people that were reporting on the fires last summer that there was a significant improvement as we went through the summer. But I think it was also clear from Mr. Filmon's report that we had some significant work to do.

I do want to say this about the staff: in terms of reviewing the forest fire situation that we had last year and the flood situation that we had last year, the staff at no time in the discussions and the reviews were defensive. They entered this exercise saying to themselves: "How can we do better?" Not trying to convince everyone that they did as well as they could have.... Everyone recognized it as we went through this. It was a horrendous time, and they were working around the clock, and they were doing their best, but they all recognized that we could do better.

The Solicitor General and the emergency preparedness group have been working on this. This is a chance for Rich to give you an update on it.

Rich, take it away.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Thank you, Premier. As you said, Mr. Filmon identified some problem areas with the way information was managed during last summer's fires. It should be noted that if you haven't had the actual event before, and you have everything in theoretical application, sometimes the people on the front line are buried with the whole issue of evacuations and all the other concerns that they have. Sometimes communication falls down, which is what happened in the early stages of last year's summer with regard to the fires.

He also noted that the public need for information was not necessarily met promptly and that the information was not always as clear as it might have been. Like the Premier said, people thought Barriere was burning, when in actual fact Barriere wasn't burning. It was McLure, and there was some information back and forth.

The whole balance between who has access during a crisis and whose lives you want to protect, including media, has always been an issue when you're dealing with a particular crisis. But early on, I don't think anybody - whether it be the provincial emergency program, or forestry, or any of the regional people involved in the emergency - would deny the fact that we weren't particularly good on the early communication as we dealt with that crisis last summer. We identified some breakdowns of communications between agencies that contributed to some public confusion. We have attempted to address some of those concerns, and I believe we have.

The report's recommendations included developing a crisis communication strategy; establishing an emergency communications team, a group of people that would understand how to handle the communications during an emergency and be trained, that would be brought in immediately whenever a major emergency struck; cooperation on training on interagencies on communication; identifying who the people are on the ground that are most important in each media area as far as the information getting out; and obviously, some public education for people as to where they might be able to access information during a crisis and the most efficient way of doing it.

As the Premier said earlier in April, we're adopting all of the Filmon recommendations, and that includes our response to the public information recommendations. Basically, what we have done.... In your books today you have the first cut of a British Columbia crisis communication strategy for major provincial emergencies. It outlines a number of tools that will be brought to bear and how they will be managed. Frankly, it is a living document, one that will be addressed as we go forward in constructive relationships with our media partners and other communities as we improve on the communications strategy going forward. The strategy identifies responsibility in a provincial emergency management structure and ensures that everyone involved understands who has authority in each situation and who signs off on information.

Within that structure, quick response communications teams will provide consistent and accurate public information. Those quick response teams will then tie into - as we did in the fires as we got better last year - the daily briefing, which would include all agencies and partners at the table so that media and local people will be able to get information that is needed for them to be able to understand what's going on. We'll be using the standard government communications tools, as well as others like information bulletins and media advisory and media releases. They'll also report through media briefings and public meetings and interviews and tours.

## [2:25]

There are two types of tours that we deal with in the case of an emergency. One is a tour which would involve the Premier or the minister or people from higher levels of government that need to come in to assess things. You need to actually coordinate that in the emergencies so that you can do that without actually taking away from the resources of the people that you're trying to let manage the emergency in the first place. Also, media tours would allow the media to have access to information on the ground as quickly as possible, which we were unable to do early on in the McLure-Barriere fire.

One especially important role is to see the local media is recognized and supported. One of the challenges we had last year was the push and pull between national, regional and local media. Like the Premier said, the people with NL Radio and the radio station in Kelowna who went on air 24 hours a day proved to be our biggest asset with regard to actually getting information to the public in those communities. We need to recognize that they need to be given the information on an as-regular basis as possible so they can continue that role.

Residents and others most affected by the emergency will rely on local media. They especially seem to rely on radio in these situations, because it's easily accessible and it isn't tied to the situations that we often face, whether it might be power outages or what have you, because we do have battery-operated radios for communication.

Communications teams will make certain that the demands of national and regional media are taken care of, but always keeping in mind that the local media and the on-ground information to people affected by the emergency have to be the priority. As each crisis winds down in the future, all emergency response staff will participate in debriefings, as will the media people. We'll ask them to come and give us input as to how we performed. Reports of these sessions will form an important part of the continuing evaluation of the strategy, allowing it to be updated after each time it is used.

Basically, what we have is a living document here today that we will continue to revise and work through as we deal with different types of situations and emergencies in the future so that we will be able to communicate effectively to the people of the province and particularly to the people that are directly affected by any emergency.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Any questions?

Okay, let's move right down, then, to the follow-up on the Filmon report, Rich.

## **For Information: Follow-up on Filmon Report**

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Thank you, Premier.

As everybody knows, the 2003 fire season was the most catastrophic in British Columbia's recorded history. Thousands of British Columbians were safely evacuated, but tragically, three pilots lost their lives. Homes were destroyed, tourism suffered, and forest harvest was affected. By any standard the destruction was quite massive.

In the midst of the crisis, British Columbians showed their true spirit and helped people displaced by fires. Firefighters and support personnel worked tirelessly to save lives, homes, communities, businesses and equipment. Amazingly, the statistics that are in front of you, or were in front of you, in your presentation bear that out.

We learned a lot from last year's experience, and we've applied that to prepare for this summer. We have provided municipal fire departments across the province with The Home Owners FireSmart Manual to distribute to residents. The manual offers recommendations, such as the one illustrated here. You can see how the land around this house has been cleared so there is less potential fuel close to the buildings.

With the Justice Institute of B.C., we have offered workshops for over 300 senior emergency officials across the province - including fire chiefs, RCMP detachment commanders, heads of public works and local government administrators - outlining their roles and responsibilities during emergencies and disasters. We have also developed a public awareness campaign using radio, television and print media to make sure British Columbians have information on current conditions around the province and get out the message that, as individuals and communities, we need to be prepared.

The Filmon report made 42 recommendations. We commissioned a comprehensive report on the 2003 fire season, which we all refer to as the Filmon report, so we could evaluate exactly what went right and where we needed to improve on our emergency response. Mr. Filmon travelled throughout British Columbia and heard from front-line firefighters, mayors, displaced homeowners, other community groups and people to gather input. On April 17 the Premier announced that government would act on all 42 Filmon recommendations so we could be prepared to protect B.C.'s communities this summer.

We have improved our first-response capability by recruiting and training an additional 100 firefighters for type 1 crews. Type 1 crews are highly trained, 20-person units that can be self-sufficient for 72 hours and stay on fire lines for up to 14 days at a time. We've already trained 180 new firefighters, bringing the total to 1,000 trained forest firefighters protecting forests and communities this summer. The Ministry of Forests has added two new Convair 580 tankers to their tanker fleet, bringing the total to 15 air tankers.

### **[2:30]**

More prescribed burns in provincial parks mean less deadwood and brush, and that means less fuel for fires. We've been doing prescribed burns in the last number of months.

The provincial emergency program has prepared a complete hazard risk and vulnerability analysis toolkit to help communities look at their risk and decide the best way to respond. The kit contains a workbook that a community can follow step by step to decide which changes and additions to local emergency programs will be most effective in the case of an emergency or a disaster. Communities can apply for a community emergency program review, and the provincial emergency program will conduct a thorough review of local emergency programs, which will help a community develop their comprehensive emergency program.

All levels of government are to manage emergencies using the British Columbia emergency response management system, or BCERMS. This will result in more consistent response to emergency situations provincewide.

Today we have an additional action, which is mandatory emergency planning. Legislation has been introduced requiring regional districts to have emergency plans in place. Additional training will be provided to improve response. Additional provincial emergency preparedness staff resources are being put in place to assist regional districts, municipalities and first nations to prepare for integrated all-hazard emergency plans.

BCERMS standardization is critical to the success of this plan because of the development of training at all levels. The training is exactly the same so that if you walk into any emergency operational centre in the province, it will look exactly the same, no matter whether you're in Terrace or Mackenzie or in Kamloops or Kelowna. The standardization, so you can move people back and forth and understand how the communication within the emergency centres works, will be standardized.

The scale of Firestorm 2003 pointed out a number of deficiencies in the recovery process at all levels. The province will work with local government and non-government organizations like the Salvation Army, the Red Cross and contracted resources to develop strategic and efficient provincial recovery planning processes. The province will also engage first nations in all aspects of emergency planning, response and recovery to ensure that all British Columbians will be ready for future emergencies.

We have provided \$3 million to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities to aid local governments in interface fuel management, to provide local emergency planning grants and to purchase community sprinkler systems. One million dollars of this came from each of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General; the Ministry of Forests; and the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, and that preparation has already begun.

Are we ready? I think we are as ready as we can be for this year's fire season, given the work that's been done and a huge body of work by Forests, CAWS and PSSG together to get this ready.

Current drought and fuel conditions indicate that this fire season could be as bad as last year. Last year at this time there had been 195 fires. This year there have been 310 fires covering 871 hectares to date. Humans caused 282 of those fires, and lightning caused 28.

We need the province and people in our province to understand that we all have to help to prevent forest fires. It's so critical that the human causation of fire disappears from the landscape for us to be successful in fighting fires this summer. You could imagine that if 80 per cent of your fires could be eliminated because of humans not starting fires, how much easier it would be for the Ministry of Forests to handle the fires we will have.

The important thing is to remember that we will always have some fires. It's an issue for us whenever they become interface fires with communities, because that's when the emergency program steps in. We have to be able to protect people's health and safety. We are remarkably good in this province at preventing fires and actually getting over top of them quickly, which has been one of the successes of this province.

**[2:35]**

There are two ways that people can report wildfire or smoke. One is a 1-800 line, which is 1-800-663-5555, or they can punch the star and 5555 on their cellular phone. I know these work because we checked them earlier today. We know they are answered quickly and promptly by professional staff who are looking for the information so they can deal with them and deal with the issues for British Columbians.

In a few minutes my colleague the Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection will be speaking about water management and other important parts of a strategy to reduce the impact of wildfires. It is everybody's responsibility that this year's fire season be better for communication, better for preparation. Those are the jobs that government has to do, and I think we've done a great job doing that. It is also everybody's responsibility to prevent forest fires by reducing the causation of fires by human intervention.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** I just want to underline that, because I think there's no question that people this year are more frightened about what may take place this year. You're hearing it all over the province. People are concerned about the potential for interface fires. It seems to me, though, that we also have to try and connect people with what they can do and what people are doing - not intentionally. It's accidental as far as we can tell, but when you think that 91 per cent of the fires that have been started so far have been human-caused, it actually makes us understand that there's lots we can do to mitigate these challenges that are in front of us.

The local communities, UBCM and local governments like Logan Lake have done a lot of work. They're focusing on this. They're trying to get themselves prepared. But each of us can do something. If you're using a provincial park, you know, you've got to be more careful. If we're out camping or hiking or driving through provincial lands, we have to be more careful. We're trying to do that. But it really is going to depend a lot on people and what they do. We can't make them do it. They have to want to do it.

Over the next few weeks and months we will be providing people with public information on what they can do, just to try and alert them to the potential impacts of what they're doing. We've already talked with some people in the forest industry to alert them about some of the practices that have taken place in the past. They've got to be careful about them.

Each of these steps we take will make a significant difference. There's no question that we will face natural conditions that are equally as bad as or maybe worse than last year. What we have to do is make sure the human conditions are substantially better this year.

For each of you, as you go around the province, remind people that that's important. As MLAs, do it. That's important. Hopefully, I think we'll find that the media will be helpful in this. Just as the broadcasters were helpful in terms of the emergency, I think they will be helpful in terms of preparing people and reminding them that what they do makes a difference in our forests.

I think the number got up to be about \$500 million that we had to spend on trying to deal with forest fires last year. That doesn't include all the challenges the ranching community faced, the cattle community faced. It doesn't include all the challenges individuals faced in their homes. We have lots we can do, if we do it together.

Rich, I just want to say thanks for the work that your folks have done. I do think the Forest Service has done a great job of responding to this as well. The new training and the new equipment we have there will certainly stand us in better stead. But I've got to tell you that clearly, the experience of being involved in that last year has a big impact on you. The biggest single impact is how huge these things are. You know, we don't kill a forest fire. It kills itself. It burns itself out. We can sometimes contain it, and if we're lucky, we can contain it. The real thing we can do that would be most important is not to start them to begin with. Hopefully, we will get that through, as well, as part of our program of preparation.

I should say thanks to the Forest Service, thanks to the emergency preparedness team. They really have done a great job. The regions and the municipalities are working hard together to try and make sure we're better prepared this year as well.

Any questions from anyone? Joyce?

**Hon. J. Murray:** I have a question for either Rich or Mike. Has there been an analysis of the sources of the human-caused fires like industrial, recreational, travelling public? Have we considered stiffer penalties for the activities or for the starting of fires so that we're really putting some teeth in that plan to eliminate human-caused fires wherever possible?

[2:40]

Hon. M. de Jong: Thanks, Joyce. In fact, the Wildfire Act that we passed just this past session does something that hasn't been in place before. In the past we have regulated industrial users on the land base. The new legislation actually regulates and imposes obligations and responsibilities on anyone that is operating on the land base.

Yes, there is analysis of the causes. We've got a hundred fires burning right now. For the information of the Finance minister, we're up to \$5 million as of this weekend.

I think you're right when you say that people need to be reminded, as they have been again today, that consequences flow. Now consequences flow legislatively, statutorily, if people.... Use your head - right? Use your common sense. My father used to say: "Use your noggin." You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that....

**Hon. G. Campbell:** We might want to use a better example than you, though, Mike.

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Perhaps.

Don't burn your fence line when there are 60-kilometre-an-hour winds taking place. We still see incidents like that, and it's disappointing, and it's frustrating. But if you use your head, a lot of this will start to take care of itself.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** I think the critical thing here, too, Joyce, is that we're not closing down the province. We're saying to people: "Come on to British Columbia. Enjoy the outdoors. Enjoy the parks. But when you do that, there are some responsibilities that we all have to meet."

I think we can meet those responsibilities if we think about it. Part of what we'll try to do over the next few weeks is make sure people are thinking about it, because people aren't going into the woods to try and cause problems. It is important that we recognize that we can remind them, and if everyone acts safely in the forest and in our parks, it will be a lot better off.

Okay. Thanks a lot, Rich.

Moving from one situation to the next, we have a situation that's building up for 2004 with regard to drought as many of you will know. Bill is going to take us through that.

Bill.

#### **For Information: 2004 Drought Preparation**

**Hon. B. Barisoff:** Thanks a lot, Premier.

On the heels of what Rich and Mike have said - that in the drought situation, drought management in this province is extremely important. We've seen last year what the hot dry weather was, and we started off this spring with extremely hot, dry weather. It's surprising when you think that everybody is excited when we get a little bit of rain, but we're certainly into a situation where it's very hot and dry.

You have the opportunity to look at the slide on the screen right now, and you'll see that in the Cranbrook area, the average temperature is actually 2.3 degrees above what it is normally. In Kelowna it's 1.7 degrees. The whole south end of the province is actually above normal temperatures, so this lends itself very much so to what's happening with the drought situation in the province.

At the same time you'll see, on this map, where the precipitation is, particularly for the south and the southeast.... That's the percentage of what it is normally, so you can see in Cranbrook it's 0.43 per cent, in Kelowna 0.22 per cent. So we're certainly into a situation where things aren't very good.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Is it 0.22 or is it 22 per cent?

**Hon. B. Barisoff:** It's 22 per cent. Sorry.

In Kelowna last year we had the driest summer since 1899 - a record 44 consecutive days without any precipitation whatsoever.

In normal circumstances where we don't have fires, the Okanagan is actually quite excited about having no rain for



that period of time. Cranbrook - second-driest summer ever. Most communities in the entire province face some kind of water restrictions and some, particularly in Summerland, actually experience a water shortage. But they're dealing with their water shortage this year.

Current conditions. I actually had the opportunity to go with the crew from the Penticton area and look at the snowpack that's up there. We're at between 60 and 80 per cent. When you take the tube down and bring it back out and check that snowpack, you realize that we were at 60 per cent last year. We're at between 60 and 80 per cent this year. Of course, every year it gets worse. What they're indicating is that when we actually do get a little bit of rain, it's going right into the ground, and it's not coming down at all, so the groundwater levels are way down.

In the Cowichan Valley we've actually had to put water restrictions on. Mr. Bruce was noting that Land and Water B.C. did it early, just in anticipation of what could take place. It is a concern for Lake Cowichan, which flows into the Cowichan River. It's a proactive step, but it's something that we felt was very important to do at this stage of the game. If we get a lot of rain or something happens that we get a lot of extra moisture, we can certainly adapt to let more water out.

[2:45]

The current conditions are, as you can see.... We're expecting exactly more of the same. The whole of western Canada is.... Environment Canada says we're going to have above normal temperatures this year, and it's going to continue. When Rich and Mike were talking about the forest fire situation, with the drought situation the way it is, it's certainly a concern for all of us.

The next map, the precipitation for the southern interior, is showing exactly....

Interjection.

**Hon. B. Barisoff:** The southern portion of the province, actually, you can see part of the.... In the Okanagan area we actually might receive normal precipitation. In the last few weeks I had the opportunity to be at the Meadowlark Festival. The members there were actually cheering, even though they couldn't get out to look at the birds and things, because it was raining, and the lake levels were coming up. There is some positive news when we get a little bit of rain, but we still must prepare for the drought situation. There are no ifs, ands or buts about it, Mr. Premier. If we don't, we're going to actually face severe shortages over time.

Given these conditions, it's essential that the drought action plan be brought into force, because after the extremely dry, hot summer we had last year, we're trying to be proactive where necessary. At an open cabinet meeting in 2003, Premier, you discussed establishing a deputy minister's committee on developing a drought action plan. That's now in place.

There are four key objectives. The first one is to protect drinking water supplies. The second, of course, is to limit the economic impacts. The third is to protect fish and wildlife, and the fourth, of course, is to protect water conservation. The fourth objective, most importantly, used sparingly and judiciously, can meet most other objectives.

We need all British Columbians to help. When I say we need all British Columbians, it's important that we all do our part. We speak about this and talk about it, but it's of the utmost importance that we conserve water. You see it when we have forest fires, where we need a lot of water. We're actually all stewards of the water. We must treat water with respect.

I think that for most of us, we look and see what's happening. We look at the lakes and all throughout British Columbia, and we just think we all of a sudden have an ample, abundant supply of water, but we certainly don't. It's a precious resource that we all have got to pay attention to.

The action plan actually identified 33 tasks. Twelve are completed. The majority of them are well underway. We certainly hope to get there.

Before developing the action plan, the task force researched the status of the community water supplies to determine how communities are managing their water. When we surveyed 277 water suppliers, over 180 water suppliers responded, representing almost 3.3 million British Columbians. The report, Status of Community Water Supplies, documents the survey results there. Twenty-five per cent of water supply systems were stressed. Two-thirds of water supply systems brought water restrictions in to ensure continued water supply for the coming year.

It found that most areas are making improvements. I just make a comment that Rick, Minister Thorpe, and I had met with the community of Summerland. They were one of the ones that were hardest hit last year. They've put a lot of things in place for this year. They feel very confident of the new things they've put in that they'll certainly get through the coming years and hope that we get a little bit more rain.

More than half of the water suppliers have a conservation plan, but half isn't good enough when we're faced with what we've got. I know that we can all do better. We need to improve the water supplies.

The result of research has driven the implementation plan, and the key opportunity, of course, is to improve on it. Education is the most important part of this, giving local governments and water purveyors the necessary tools so that they know what to do when they can do it.

[2:50]

In this, Mr. Premier - it's actually through George's ministry, of course, so I don't get tagged with this extra \$2 million from Gary - \$2 million in financial assistance is being brought forward for communities with stressed water supplies. We need drought management water conservation plans.

We also have a handbook for local governments that were dealing with drought so that they all can be prepared ahead of time. The reference to fire communications in the handbook - that's provided by the Ministry of Forests and the Solicitor General as part of the Filmon response, which I think will go a long way. We want to include tools, templates to take action to enable communities to be proactive managers of water - in the templates, the water supply plan, water conservation plan, drought management plan, emergency supply plan.

Identify steps for pending loss of water source- if one source is lost, where they can get another source of water.

Another tool is model bylaws to assist local governments with the legislative requirements for water conservation initiatives. Research shows that these items are making available.... They should be available sometime by mid-June.

Workshops to assist the communities in what they can do for water management. We're actually going to visit local governments and councils to help them in what they can do for water management and to help water purveyors also. Most local water suppliers have the authority to put in place restrictions - represent final step before water comes out of the tap. Water purveyors and municipalities can actually do this. We're just trying to give them more tools and the ability to do it.

We have Jim Mattison from Land and Water B.C. here in attendance. More information on drought information is on the webpage at [www.lwbc.bc.ca](http://www.lwbc.bc.ca). Others that want to look it up and get more information can do that.

There's, of course, cross-government action required. My ministry is a member of the task force. Water is central to fish and wildlife and recreation. Protection of water resources is actually a major part of Water, Land and Air Protection's role.

We've been monitoring the snowpacks and the stream flows and groundwater - maintains biweekly drought monitor for current regions and concerns.

As I mentioned earlier, I had the opportunity where we're still seeing that we're at that 60 to 80 per cent range.... We're still working with it. We're trying to get most people to be educated so we get the voluntary conservation measures, because it's so important, through education, that people can actually do this on their own. We could be in for, you know, severe drought. We're certainly working towards that we're not, because lack of water, as we've seen before, is a loss of fish habitat, poor spawning. It causes a lot of grief for the stocks in all the particular lakes.

It impacts all of us on the whole. It impacts first nations, licensed water users, the tourism industry and the service industry. It's important for all of us to take heed of what happens if there is poor conservation with water, because it does affect a lot of areas. Of course, in my area it's the fish and wildlife that are very affected by low flow-sensitive streams. We have a lot of things happening where, when you get the low water, you affect the fish in a lot of different ways.

To protect drinking water supplies, my ministry has set up limits for industrial discharge through surface groundwater. We closely monitor discharges if water levels fluctuate and ensure that environmental standards are met. Of course, we're working with the industry, so we limit the economic impacts wherever possible.

Water is also central to fishing. I mention that because I like getting out and doing some of that - kayaking, hiking, camping, etc. Water quality is monitored in campgrounds, and Mr. Premier, we're actually doing very well in the campgrounds, and things are going very well. We should be able to get as many tourists out to the campgrounds as possible for the coming year, because we are doing very good water management in the campgrounds for the coming summer.

At this point in time I just want to turn it over to John, to Minister van Dongen. He's going to do just an update on the effect that water has on the agricultural community.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** John?

[2:55]

**Hon. J. van Dongen:** Thank you, Bill. Thank you, Premier.

Agriculture is a major economic driver in the province. It is also a big user of water. When you get successive years of drought - we had drought last year; we're facing another potential drought this year - that's certainly serious for agriculture. I just want to point out that with the BSE situation that started May 20 last year, we have a record number of cattle in the province. We've had delayed marketing of cattle, so we've got a large beef herd out there as well as all of the other needs of agriculture for crop irrigation, etc.

Agriculture is a large, consumptive user, so it uses the water. Access to water is critical, but at the same time, as Bill has said, there is a responsibility for agriculture to use that water wisely. On the slide you'll see that if we use the

Okanagan as an example, agriculture uses 70 per cent of the water in the Okanagan. Admittedly, the Okanagan is one of the drier areas in the province, but we also have some very important agricultural activity in that area.

Our ministry plays an active role with the industry on water management and drought management issues. Last week we announced a partnership with the federal government where the province is contributing \$2.5 million towards a national water supply expansion program. We're making those contributions in kind, and the federal contribution to that is \$5.6 million. This program is to help enhance water supply for B.C. farmers and regional operations.

We also provide leadership with the industry in terms of better utilization of water, more efficient use of the water that we're using and a better job of managing the demand for that water. There's a lot of work that can be done through better scheduling of irrigation and having more efficient irrigation systems. There's quite a difference in the water requirements depending on the technology you use.

Our staff have developed management guides for irrigation. We've used the website to convey some of that information. We also have various toolkits that farmers can use. We also run training sessions for irrigation equipment dealers and designers so that we design the most efficient systems possible in terms of on-farm placement of these systems.

This is going to be a critical year for agriculture. There's no question about it. Agriculture will be impacted. As I said, we've certainly conveyed to the farming community the need to utilize water wisely to get maximum value out of that water, and we'll look forward to working with the other ministries, such as Water, Land and Air Protection, and all of the other players to make sure we try and meet all of the needs for water this coming summer.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Can I just, before we go on here...? I mean, we're having sessions now to train people about the use of water. British Columbia, at least in my mind, has always been a place that had a lot of water, and when you have a lot of water, you sort of think: "Well, I'll just keep using it, thank you very much." But there are places that don't have a lot of water. Do we need to train or do we need to get them to upgrade their irrigation systems so that they're actually using less water?

**Hon. J. van Dongen:** We need to do all of those things. Certainly, it's a multi-pronged approach to getting better value. You're talking about technology. You're talking about equipment. But you're also talking about how that equipment is used, and those are discretionary decisions by the farmers. You've got things like design. You've got things like the type of irrigation systems that you have. There are pros and cons to those. Then there's the management that goes into each of those systems. We're doing both of those things.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Go ahead, Bill.

**Hon. B. Barisoff:** Thanks, John.

Premier, as you mentioned, I think there are a lot of areas that agriculture is.... With drip irrigation, among other things, particularly in the Okanagan, they are finding ways to use less water.

Agriculture uses a lot, but actually, our personal use is a lot. B.C. is amongst the world's highest users of water. The Canadian average is 340 litres a day; the B.C. average is 490 litres per day. As you can see behind me, the average daily use of British Columbia's water is 672 bottles of water every single, solitary day. This use is actually way too high. As you mentioned, Premier, when we look around, we see the abundance of water that we think we have, but when we get into these drought situations, we find.... When you look at what each person uses every day - 672 bottles - during dry times, I think we've all got to do our part in making sure we start to reduce what's happening.

[3:00]

Now, there are a number of easy ways to reduce consumption and take the pressure off water supplies. You can take shorter showers. You'd save 16 to 19 litres a minute if you took a shorter shower. I see smiles around the room. I'm not suggesting that we have more showers together or anything. Just take shorter showers. Low-flow shower heads save up to ten litres a minute. Five-minute showers could save 50 litres. While it's running, up to 12 litres a minute is what comes out.

If you turn the tap off when you're brushing your teeth twice a day, you can save up to 20 litres. Doing the same for five minutes of dishwashing, you can save up to 50 litres. Water your garden using a water can. A spring-loaded nozzle saves 10 to 35 litres a minute. Five minutes could mean 100 litres saved. These few steps actually could save 200 to 250 litres. Look at how much - 250 bottles of water - you could save.

These steps alone don't apply to everyone. What I'm suggesting to people is that they should find what applies to them and where they can use it best for themselves so that we can actually all conserve water. Water conservation isn't difficult, but it takes an effort. These few tips certainly make a difference for all concerned. Turning your tap off.... A lot of people I know just let their taps run at times. I think it's simply because we think we have an abundance of water, because water in British Columbia is probably one of the richest resources we have. We don't think about it until we get ourselves into a drought situation.

In my particular part of the province, Premier - living in the South Okanagan - we know how valuable and scarce it is. Over the last number of years I think the village councils of all the communities in the South Okanagan in particular, and probably the Okanagan, have looked at these kinds of things and have addressed these situations. I know that even last year in my community in Oliver we didn't have water restrictions, because it's something that people have looked at over a number of years - looked at xeriscape landscaping. I know that in Rick's riding in Summerland they're

doing a lot this year because they did run into some problems with the water situation last year.

As John has mentioned, orchardists are looking at a number of different things with drip irrigation. I know the vineyards are looking at drip irrigation - doing things where we can all conserve. When you look at the little bits that we can all save, it makes an awful lot of difference. Many, many communities embrace water conservation, and there are a lot of others that are looking to actually catch up.

We've got to be vigilant. We have to work in partnership to ensure that conservation becomes a regular daily practice for all of us. When you see, behind me, what we consume - 672 bottles of water every single, solitary day - I think it kind of hits home for all of us to understand that if we do some of these things and we all do the little things, it adds up to actually millions of litres every year that we can save.

When we get the highs and the lows of the drought.... We're into this drought situation right now. I know, Premier, that a lot of the communities with the drought management plan that you had us put into place.... It will benefit all the communities of the province. It's certainly something that I know you are very much in favour of. I know we're all in favour of making it happen. When you talk to the Solicitor General or the Minister of Forests about the impact that low water supplies could have on the forest fires and what's happened there with the forest fire fighting, I think we all understand the importance of the conservation of water.

With that, I want to put in a plug to all British Columbians that if they all do their part, this won't be the hardest thing to do, but the little conservation methods will certainly help the province as a whole. Thank you, Premier.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Thanks, Bill. I've got questions from Rick and Gary.

[3:05]

**Hon. R. Thorpe:** Thank you, Premier.

Bill, you talked about ministries working cooperatively. I know in my area of British Columbia there is another level of government that was involved in this. That's the DFO. What role is DFO bringing to finding solutions and working with communities to find solutions?

**Hon. B. Barisoff:** Thanks, Rick. I think there was a huge concern, particularly in the Summerland area last year, with the different levels of government, with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and our ministry, the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. I think the important thing we have to stress to all levels of government, including the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, is that when we ran into this situation last year in Summerland.... We have a number of users. We have, of course, the domestic users that are using it for water supplies, for drinking water. We have the agriculture community that was using it for orchards and vineyards, and of course, we then also have the fish stocks and the fish and wildlife that are using it for the wildlife sector of the economy.

We're trying to work with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and make them understand that, you know, there are all the water users that are doing it. You know that when we had the meeting with the city of Summerland that.... We're trying to come to an agreement with DFO so that the discharges and the amount of water actually accommodate all users, not just one in particular.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Gary.

**Hon. G. Collins:** Thank you, Premier.

Bill, I just wanted to ask.... I know we've had a dry spell for at least a couple of years now. It's been quite dry, and it looked earlier this spring like it was going to continue that way forever. Now, we've had quite a bit of rain in the last couple of weeks. I know everybody thinks that perhaps that's finished now and we don't have a drought anymore. I have no clue as to how much it has to rain before we sort of replenish the groundwater and the lakes and the rivers and get back to some sense of normal.

As the Premier said, we were....

**Hon. G. Campbell:** I was going to say roughly 40 days and 40 nights. [Laughter.]

**Hon. G. Collins:** Don't say that. Given the track record, we'll have it.

The Premier mentioned that we were in Toronto at this health conference. I know that flying back yesterday.... I landed in Edmonton on the way back to Vancouver, and it was sopping wet there. I mean, the fields were covered in water. Flying over the mountains into British Columbia, you could see down through some of the clouds. I couldn't tell exactly where we were, but there was a lot of water running in the mountains. I don't know what part of the province we were in at that time. I can't remember what time it was.

Then flying into the lower mainland, there is a lot of standing water around now. It's probably because we have had a fair bit of rain for the last week or two. Is that having any impact at all? I mean, how much of that do we have to have before we actually start to see a bit of relief on this front?

**Hon. B. Barisoff:** There's no doubt, Gary, that it has a very positive impact - the rain that we're getting now. Our bigger problem is that spring came two to four weeks early, so we had a huge melt that came early. The reservoir of snow that built up, which normally would start coming at this time of the year to keep refilling the reservoirs, actually isn't there anymore, because it came early.

The other, bigger problem we have is that because of the last two years of the drought situation we had, the ground has been absorbing so much of it. We need a lot of rain in June if we can get it. It certainly will help. The rain that we've had in the last two weeks has certainly been a huge advantage. In fact, Okanagan Lake at this point in time is actually a touch higher than what it was last year, and they were worried about refilling the entire lake.

But the fact that we don't have that reservoir of water that's up in the hills right now is still causing lots of concern because of the fact that we're not going to get a lot of runoff that's going to come forward. It came two to four weeks early. It's still a concern. You know, if we could get - I'm not going to say it - a lot more rain, a huge amount of rain that we could get in the next month.... We've got to bear in mind that where I come from in the Okanagan, it has got to stop in the next couple of weeks, because we've got to get the cherries off. We don't want to be having too much.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** You're not able to control that?

**Hon. B. Barisoff:** I know I certainly wish I could control that part, but I just don't have that ability yet.

[3:10]

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Kev?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Thank you, Premier.

Bill, part of my question was asked by Rick with DFO, because I have a hazy recollection - I think it was in Summerland, actually - that DFO last year was threatening to sue the community over their rather revolutionary idea that they needed water for their people. I'm hoping that is something that when we work towards it, DFO actually becomes part of the solution and not just part of the problem.

The other thing, as I reflected on a lot of your suggestions there for how we can save water.... At the end of the day, one of the things that many communities are moving towards that I think really will far better address that is water metering. In Surrey, for example, the largest municipality, certainly, in the lower mainland, they've got a water metering program in effect. The province actually contributed quite substantially to that through an infrastructure grant - I believe somewhere in the \$1 million range. They have been moving quite aggressively on water metering. I think that is important, because only when the public starts to realize that there is a correlation between the amount used and the cost associated with it will you start to see people actually change in behaviour.

I'm just wondering, Bill, because I only know from my little part of the world in Surrey that that's underway: are other communities looking at that? Is this something we're encouraging across the province?

**Hon. B. Barisoff:** Surprisingly enough, when they do put water metering in, it actually reduces the water consumption by as much as - at least - 30 per cent. It is a huge cost, though, that has to be born by the municipalities and by the water users.

I dare to say that we want to encourage water metering. I think it's more important if we encourage the education and the best possible use of water. The reason I say that is because I know that we don't have water metering in a number of communities in the South Okanagan. You know, we live in the desert side. We live in what's part of the only desert in Canada, and water conservation has been on peoples' minds for many years. When we can actually do the educational side of it and get people realizing the impact.... I think the 672 bottles of water that we have behind me shows what we consume every day. When people start to become aware of these kinds of things, most people are prepared to do it.

If you have to get to water metering, it is something I guess we would have to do. I would certainly hope that if we can do it through education.... It would save a lot of dollars by not having to go in that direction, but it has proven effective in the fact that it reduces water consumption by 30 per cent.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Stan?

**Hon. S. Hagen:** Thank you, Premier, and thanks, Bill. Good presentation. I'm just confused about the numbers, though. You have told us that the average Canadian uses 343 litres per day. The average British Columbian uses 489.5 litres a day. Then you've related that to that stack of bottles behind you. Are those not one litre bottles? Are they 750 millilitres?

**Hon. B. Barisoff:** They're 750 millilitre bottles - just so you know. The prop is supposed to be exactly right, Stan. It does give that indication so people understand that when you look at 772 bottles of water behind us, and they are 750 millilitre bottles, it certainly is a lot that we use.

I think we go back to the comment the Premier made. We just simply think the abundance of water.... When we look at the lakes and streams that we have in the province, it's huge, but in the drought years, water conservation is extremely important.

**A Voice:** Premier, Graham Bruce would like to take those bottles to Cowichan.

**Hon. B. Barisoff:** For one day's use.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** One person's use.

**Hon. B. Barisoff:** One person's use.

**Hon. R. Neufeld:** It's working.

Gary, a little bit in response to your question. B.C. Hydro obviously operates across the whole province and keeps very close records on water in their reservoirs, so I'll just give you a few numbers here. This is as of April 1. The Williston, which is in northeast B.C., is at 94 per cent. Kinbasket is at 94 per cent. Revelstoke is at 85 per cent.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Those are of average - right?

**Hon. R. Neufeld:** Average. That's where we're at April 1.

Arrow was at 98 per cent. Kootenay Lake is at 86 per cent. Southwest B.C. and Vancouver Island basins range from 79 per cent to 93 per cent.

We are down. That's down from what we should normally be, but that's the level they're at now.

[3:15]

**Hon. G. Campbell:** The fact is - I think what we heard last year, and I'm sure it's still the case - that you build up your water tables - right? The water tables have been going down significantly for the past, I think, five or maybe six years, so you can have sort of an inundation of rain, and it runs off. One of the things we know about the fires is that there's nothing to hold the water in the land anymore, so it runs off. It will take quite a bit of time, probably, to build the tables back up to where they've been typically in British Columbia.

Any other questions? Okay. Thanks a lot, Bill.

Next up on the agenda is avian flu update. John.

#### **For Information: Avian Flu Update**

**Hon. J. van Dongen:** Thank you, Premier.

I would start off with a comment that as a farmer, I certainly learned a long time ago that you can never totally control nature - much as farmers try to. When you look at some of the topics on our agenda today, all of them are an illustration of that.

Speaking to the avian influenza situation, this has been a very difficult three months for farmers, particularly in the Fraser Valley. Really, it's been the equivalent of a wildfire crisis in the Fraser Valley. Like the fires last summer, this high-pathogen virus moved very, very quickly and in its early stages was quite unpredictable. Like BSE, this avian influenza incident is the most significant of its kind in Canada's history.

The good news is that it appears that we have turned the corner and that we have the movement of the virus under control. There are no new infections of avian influenza that have been detected since May 5, and the depopulation of further flocks has been suspended, effective last Thursday, by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

While federal authorities continue to monitor the health of the remaining flocks, our focus as a ministry is in working with the industry to help get it back to economic health. I want to remind everyone that CFIA, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, is the lead agency on this issue. The Animal Health Centre in Abbotsford and our ministry, through routine testing, identified the avian influenza virus and, based on routine protocols, forwarded that information to the CFIA.

The Animal Health Centre has continued to provide surveillance and testing support to the federal lab in Winnipeg, and today our centre has tested close to 6,500 samples. This testing and having these additional resources involved have ensured rapid identification of positive premises and allowed for negative birds to go through normal processing channels to the consumer. Ministry staff worked with the CFIA and the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection to identify safe disposal options, and the industry has been an active partner with the CFIA in depopulation planning and disposal and the recovery planning that is now underway.

Closely involved to address human health concerns were Health Canada, the Fraser Valley health authority, the Ministry of Health Services, and the B.C. Centre for Disease Control. Thankfully, this strain of virus, while deadly for poultry, has little effect on human health. The epidemiological investigation continues, and it is important to note there is no conclusive evidence to date on how the virus was introduced and spread.

B.C. took on an even greater and more active role when the Premier and the Solicitor General on April 14 made the decision to bring forward the full resources of the provincial emergency program to help the CFIA with bird disposal and the ongoing depopulation efforts. At its peak more than 120 provincial staff were involved with avian flu under the provincial emergency program. The ongoing cooperation between all levels of government and industry has been essential to eradicating the AI virus as quickly as possible, and I can say that our ministry was a catalyst in helping keep all these agencies working together.

**[3:20]**

To review how the avian influenza case unfolded, in mid-February 2004 the ministry's Animal Health Centre identified the virus at a poultry farm near Abbotsford in the Fraser Valley. The federal Canadian Food Inspection Agency destroyed that flock and stepped up surveillance, and over time more infected flocks were identified. By April 5 the CFIA agreed with industry that the best solution would be to depopulate all 19 million commercial birds in the Fraser Valley from Vancouver to Hope - a decision that we as a government supported.

We did hit a crisis over the Easter weekend, when our disposal needs grew critical. We brought that to cabinet on April 14. On April 16 the Premier ordered the provincial emergency structure to be deployed to support the CFIA in eradicating the disease. By then we had 31 commercial premises that had been identified as positive. This was a key strategic decision. We were instrumental in setting the May 21 target date, and everybody involved agrees that the discipline and structure that the provincial emergency program brought to the effort was very appropriate and very helpful.

Our current situation. CFIA has suspended depopulation, as I said, with the concurrence of the industry. A total of 42 positive commercial farms and 11 positive backyard flocks have been depopulated. The CFIA will continue to very actively monitor all remaining flocks, and they will act immediately if another infected flock is found.

The mass depopulation has been suspended, with about 1.6 million birds left on about 58 commercial farms. Many of these birds are breeding birds and layers, and they can be used to help restart the recovery effort much more quickly than what had been anticipated.

Cleaning and disinfection are underway and will continue into June. There are currently seven farms completed. The total number of infected birds destroyed was just over 1.25 million. The federal CFIA focused on depopulating all the birds in the three-kilometre zone around each infected farm. That included both commercial flocks and backyard flocks.

All of the positive birds were disposed of through incineration or biological heat treatment. Our ministry's centralized composting initiative was used to dispose of approximately one million uninfected but unmarketable birds, and this avoided the need for landfills for these birds. A very small number of birds were directed to a landfill, and that was the landfill in Chilliwack. We appreciated their assistance, which was provided at a very critical phase while we were ramping up other options just around the Easter weekend.

It's important to note that the total number of non-infected birds - these were negative birds - that went to market was approximately 14 million, so it isn't a case of 19 million birds went to disposal or were not fully utilized. It was about 14 million that went to market. The total number of birds destroyed or marketed was 17.3 million.

In terms of getting back to business, cleaning and disinfection is the first priority. Now that the birds have been removed and disposed of, infected farms are required to be inspected, cleaned and disinfected. There are a number of steps, including at least four inspections by the CFIA, before each premise can be pronounced clean and clear. More than 200 people are working on the cleaning and disinfecting operations. All infected premises must be cleaned and disinfected to CFIA specs before birds can be placed on any of these farms. The CFIA is actively working with industry on the details of a repopulation and recovery plan. Birds can only start to be placed on farms 21 days after the CFIA pronounces that the last infected farm is fully cleaned and disinfected. As of today, that looks to be about halfway into June. About June 14 would be my best estimate of when that 21-day period would start. That would be about the earliest it would be.

The repopulation process will take up to 18 months, as production will have to be staged to ensure continuity of supply. Certainly, this will vary a lot depending on which poultry commodity you're talking about. In terms of what that means, after a 21-day wait period, we will not see B.C. chicken back in our stores until certainly after Labour Day at the earliest.

**[3:25]**

Looking at layers, after the 21-day wait period you'll have to add another 22 weeks, or approximately 44 weeks - next spring at the earliest - before new B.C.-produced eggs are available in stores. We do have, as I said, the approximately 29 layer farms that will continue to be producing.

Internationally, it will be six months before we could possibly see trade bans lifted by other countries on whatever export we're doing. Extensive surveillance must continue during all of this time, as well as continuing education to reinforce the need for adequate biosecurity measures.

I want to talk a bit about mitigating economic damage and what we've done to help mitigate damage. Our first line of defence was to assist all aspects of the industry to mitigate damage. The Ministry of Skills Development and Labour exempted businesses from severance pay for prolonged layoff, and workers have had access to federal job-share programs. These are provisions that the industry asked for to help them keep their good staff, and certainly, all efforts have been directed towards keeping staff and taking advantage of federal work-sharing programs. Processing plants

and feed mills, for example, have put a lot of staff on work-share programs so their people can keep working part-time and they can participate in that federal program.

The industry worked with their national agencies and provincial marketing boards to gear up production from other provinces to meet B.C. processors' needs. Subsequent to that, or further to that, we have worked with our federal and provincial counterparts to get secured access to supplementary imports. Our first line of defence was to gear up, as much as possible, Canadian production to provide raw product supply to our processors and then to supplement that with supplementary imports from the United States. These actions have meant that approximately two-thirds of processor jobs have been maintained in B.C. Our goal was also to help our processors and our major egg-grading operation maintain as much as possible their existing book of business, which is obviously very, very critical to them.

It also must be understood that our specialty producers face greater vulnerability. We're very conscious of that, and we'll keep that in mind in terms of some of the work we will continue to do for and with the industry.

In terms of economic impacts, and just to summarize those, this industry is valued at about \$850 million at the retail level for all poultry commodities and about \$370 million at the farm gate. That doesn't take into account all of the service industry around all aspects of this industry, which is significant. The industry employs more than 1,500 workers on farms and about 2,300 in processing facilities. Based on a survey that industry conducted this month, depopulation of Fraser Valley flocks has reduced industry employment initially by about 42 per cent. This estimate includes primary sectors as well as feed companies, catching crews and others. Monthly wage losses are estimated to run at almost \$5 million.

Again, we see how important agriculture is in the economy. We've talked of these multipliers of \$1 at the farm gate producing \$7 of economic activity. When you have that in a concentrated area in the Fraser Valley, such as we see illustrated with the impact of avian influenza, then you really see that those are valid numbers. The duration and pattern of layoffs will change as barns are cleaned and during the rebuilding of flocks. The avian flu has also affected the allied trades, such as transportation, and it very much had an emotional as well as a financial impact on families, including hobby farmers and pet owners.

In terms of the challenges ahead and assistance, the first line of support for farmers and producers in this kind of situation is the federal funding under the Health of Animals Act, the federal act which is administered by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The level of federal compensation for destroyed flocks is still under discussion between the industry and the CFIA. Representatives of specialty flocks are also actively involved in these discussions. Further to that, poultry producers are also eligible for the federal-provincial assistance under the disaster provisions of the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program.

### **[3:30]**

Like BSE, this will be a further unanticipated drain on B.C.'s budget for this program. I'm talking about the 40 per cent provincial share that we bring to that program, together with the federal government's 60 per cent. We will be making a presentation to Treasury Board shortly to at least give them an initial indication of where we see the situation going. We also recognize that like BSE, we may need to seek modifications to the CAIS program, especially for specialty flocks. These modifications would have to be negotiated with the federal government.

The CFIA, the industry and the ministry are working together to review and revise, as necessary, biosecurity protocols for the industry. With the industry and the CFIA, we will continue to educate farmers, suppliers to farms and visitors on this need for biosecurity. There will be new biosecurity control measures introduced as required. The review will also include mechanisms to ensure compliance with these biosecurity protocols.

In conclusion, this continues to be a difficult situation that will require further difficult decisions. Producers have lost flocks, with lifelong commitment to their breeding stock. Also, people with backyard flocks have lost their sometimes hobby flock but sometimes very intense specialty flock operations. Processing workers and allied trades - a lot of people have lost, at least on a temporary basis, their jobs. But everyone has pulled together, and everyone did understand the need for aggressive cooperative action.

I do think it's important to recognize the contribution of industry, citizens, the CFIA, local governments and many other government agencies. Our staff at the Ministry of Agriculture have gone from working flat out on BSE to working flat out on avian flu and BSE. Particularly, the resource management branch were working extremely long hours right through the Easter weekend when we ran into the crunch on the disposal issues. Also, thanks to the laboratory staff at the Animal Health Centre. Their increased level of activity really allowed us to speed up the depopulation effort after April 16.

I also want to recognize Minister Colin Hansen and the Ministry of Health Services, the Centre for Disease Control, and the public health authorities for their support and efforts to minimize health and safety risks to both workers and the public; and to recognize Minister Rich Coleman and all the staff who worked within the provincial emergency structure. Their coordination brought the industry's recovery forward by about six weeks and saved, in our view, tens of millions of dollars.

It's also important to recognize that consumers and the public throughout British Columbia continued to support the industry, as they did with BSE. That's a statement about their confidence in our food safety system in Canada and in British Columbia, but it's also a statement of support for the industry. It's very important. When an industry is faced with these kinds of tough times, it's important for them to know that they have consumer support and confidence.

We will see in the next number of months, hopefully, fewer headlines, but the work continues. There are certainly some difficult times and difficult decisions ahead. We will continue to update cabinet in the next few months, Premier, as we work through this crisis.



**Hon. G. Campbell:** Thanks, John.

Let me just say, on behalf of at least all of us, that I think this was an example where the producers - the people who were most directly and most negatively impacted - put themselves at the bottom of the list and put public safety at the top of the list. I think the producers and the processors, throughout this, were just exemplary in terms of - in the biggest and best sense of the word - their citizenship. They were selfless in the directions that they took. In many cases I think they were leading us. I think they are owed a great deal of public thanks for that commitment.

[3:35]

You know, there were families that were committed. I think, again, that the communities of Chilliwack and Abbotsford stood up with their colleagues in the valley and said: "We have to find a way through this together." They were willing to share their resources, their time, their effort, their energy.

You've mentioned the staff that did an exceptional job, but I really do think that at the end of the day, it was the producers and the workers in the industry who went through this in a way that was really pretty selfless. There were also the people in the communities that went through the vehicle checks and all of those sorts of things. There were virtually no complaints about that, virtually nobody that was resisting it. Everyone was trying to cooperate and go through that, and that's something that I think we should recognize as well.

I should mention, too - for those of you who weren't with us at the joint cabinet meeting with Alberta in Prince Rupert - that we, British Columbia and Alberta, intend to try and launch a similar review to the Filmon review on forest fires as to how we were able to manage both the BSE crisis and the avian flu crisis. There's lots we should learn. There's lots that we did learn as we went through it. I think we have to find ways that we're dealing with that.

Many people were surprised that CFIA was actually in the federal Ministry of Health. Decision-making has clearly been an issue as we have gone through. I think that when cabinet decided on April 14 that we were going to ask the emergency preparedness program to go in.... I think that Rich working with John, and their staffs working together, made a big difference just in decision-making and how that actually flowed through. It may well be that sometimes, someone outside of the agriculture sort of environment has to be there to help set up that decision-making.

Again, this is in no way to criticize what's taken place. It's to say we'd better get all the lessons out of these experiences that we possibly can, both BSE and avian flu - different situations. The one thing that I think was common was the commitment of citizens to the industry. I think Canada is the only place in the world where BSE has been found where consumption of beef went up. That's a real tribute to citizens. As John said, citizens have been there, indeed, for the poultry industry as well.

I do think we have to learn from this. We are going to pursue that. If need be and if the federal health agency isn't willing to join with us - I'm sure they will be, but if they're not - we'll carry it out ourselves with Alberta with regard to that.

Provinces want to do it. I'm sure it'll be something we bring to the Western Premiers' Conference in June - where is the June meeting? - in the Northwest Territories. We'll be taking that forward, and hopefully we'll have the federal government embrace it as well. It has had a huge impact on families in both of the industries, and it does take a long time to recover. I think our commitment should be to those people in the industry, as we know it takes time to recover. We're going to help them get through this and recover, and we'll do it with them in the spirit of cooperation that they showed throughout this ordeal.

Thank you, John.

If there are no further questions.... John Les.

**Hon. J. Les:** Thank you, Premier. I certainly want to echo the comments you've just made.

This has been a pretty tough road for producers in the Fraser Valley, both financially and emotionally, but they have been exemplary in terms of how they've dealt with it very realistically and responsibly.

Now that the crisis appears to be over, of course, many of them are turning their minds to repopulating their farms. I wondered if perhaps John could tell us who will be making the decisions in respect of repopulation. Will that be the CFIA or the marketing boards, or is there someone else that will be making those decisions? I'm sure every poultry producer out there is looking forward to getting their barn full again and back into the swing of production.

**Hon. J. van Dongen:** The whole repopulation recovery effort will be very much a collaborative effort. Certainly, there's been active discussion of that for two or three weeks now. There are certain decisions which will clearly be CFIA decisions, but I believe there is a very good interactive process taking place that involves the CFIA and involves the industry. I think the Premier's comments about the industry were absolutely appropriate in terms of their very valid understanding of this problem early on and how to deal with it.

[3:40]

The CFIA and the industry will be combining the best possible science with appropriate risk assessment to govern the

decisions that are made around repopulation. Certainly, we have our ministry staff, and we have some very good veterinarians that are also involved in that process.

I think that the CFIA now has a better understanding of the economic side of this crisis and is working, as I said, very collaboratively to look at options, to develop options, to assess risk and to find the most appropriate way to move ahead as quickly as possible on repopulation - but obviously, having the appropriate checks and balances in place in terms of monitoring surveillance and risk assessment as they go forward.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Rich.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Thanks, Premier.

I would hope the CFIA will participate in the postmortem of this and the review. I think one thing we learned here is that the further away from the problem the decision-making is, the more difficult it is to get the decisions on the ground quickly enough to react. I think it's important to remember that.

The only other thing I want to add, to the people in the Fraser Valley, is that they should remember they have some very good friends in Princeton. The town of Princeton really came to the forefront for the valley and allowed a tremendous amount of incineration and continued to cooperate with us through this entire process. So the little town of Princeton, on the other side of Manning Park, is a group that the people in the Fraser Valley should remember, going forward, because they were really terrific to the people down there.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Thanks, Rich.

Okay. We're adjourned. Thank you very much.

The cabinet adjourned at 3:42 p.m.



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