

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

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## **Official Report of Debates (Hansard)**

IN-11

## **Journal des débats (Hansard)**

IN-11

### **Standing Committee on the Interior**

### **Comité permanent des affaires intérieures**

#### **Estimates**

Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

#### **Budget des dépenses**

Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Protection de  
la nature et des Parcs

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Thursday 18 May 2023

1<sup>re</sup> session  
43<sup>e</sup> législature

Jeudi 18 mai 2023

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Chair: Aris Babikian  
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Aris Babikian  
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON THE INTERIOR**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT  
DES AFFAIRES INTÉRIEURES**

Thursday 18 May 2023

Jeudi 18 mai 2023

*The committee met at 1530 in committee room 2.*

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT,  
CONSERVATION AND PARKS

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Good afternoon. The Standing Committee on the Interior will now come to order. The committee is about to begin consideration of the 2023-24 estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks for a total of two hours.

As this is the first ministry before the committee, I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the purpose of the estimates committee is for members of the Legislature to determine if the government is spending money appropriately, wisely and effectively in the delivery of the services intended. As Chair, I will allow members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee to ensure they are confident the ministry will spend those dollars appropriately.

In the past, members have asked questions about the delivery of similar programs in previous fiscal years, about the policy framework that supports a ministry approach to a problem or service delivery or about the competence of a ministry to spend the money wisely and efficiently. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the members asking the questions to make the questioning relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has made arrangements to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked by the research office. Are there any questions from members before we start? I see none.

I'm now required to call vote 1101, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Minister, the floor is yours.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, members of committee, for having me here today to talk about estimates and our outlook for the year ahead. It's wonderful to be here with all of you, and I apologize that it's on a Thursday afternoon after the Legislature has risen.

I'd like to first start by saying this is such an important exercise for providing the public with insights on the government's priorities and actions, and in particular, the priorities of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

I'd first like to give you all an idea of the size of the ministry, which has a myriad of responsibilities each and every day. I continue to enjoy the opportunity to be in this role. We touch so many things in the province of Ontario and are backed by an incredible ministry staff. I'll briefly name each of the divisions, what they do, and give you just one example of the work they've been doing to preserve and protect Ontario's environment to give you a better idea of the kind of work that each division does. Keep in mind, it's just one example from each, and is in no way indicative of the breadth and scope of work that they do. I'll first start with the climate change and resiliency division, which leads our ministry's efforts to take meaningful action to address climate change. Before I get there, I would also add that I'm joined by the Deputy Minister Imbrogno, who has done a fantastic job at the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks as well.

Our climate change and resiliency division includes lowering our greenhouse gas emissions to meet our 2030 targets of reducing our GHG emissions by 30% below our 2005 levels. Cumulatively to date, Ontario is responsible for approximately 86% of the federal government's progress to date. I'm pleased to report that our modelling shows that the province is on track to achieve its 2030 greenhouse gas emissions targets. In fact, as I said, most of Canada's progress towards its target has come from Ontario. Our absolute reductions since 2005 surpass those of any other province or territory in Canada.

One of the ways we work to achieve this reduction is through our emissions performance standards, which we implemented at the beginning of last year. It has replaced the more costly federal output-based pricing system that was in place from 2019 to 2021, and it's expected to save Ontario industry approximately \$1.1 billion over the next eight years, from 2023 through 2030, while holding polluters accountable for their greenhouse gas emissions. The system is tough but fair, cost effective and flexible.

I'd also add the landmark agreement and progress we've been making collaboratively with the federal government to decarbonize steel, arguably one of the biggest decarbonization efforts taking place in North America today, taking over 2.2 million cars off the road.

Secondly, our land and water division protects the diversity of resources in Ontario and is responsible for the oversight and leadership of the species at risk, provincial parks and conservation reserves, protection of Ontario's drinking water sources and ecological health of the Great Lakes and inland waters.

A recent example of work of LWD division is our recent announcement to protect boreal caribou. This was a truly historic investment, the largest investment to protect boreal caribou in Ontario's history. As a part of our commitment, the investment included approximately \$29.4 million. It will be for on-the-ground activities that support the maintenance and recovery of boreal caribou. With this funding, we'll continue work in partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations that have important knowledge and on-the-ground understanding of boreal caribou.

I look forward in the Q&A to perhaps elaborating a little bit on some great conversations we've had with partners like Biigtigong First Nation and Chief Michano.

It ensures the conservation measures in this agreement, and it will continue to be informed by evidence-based science and Indigenous traditional knowledge. The agreement is indeed key to managing caribou recovery while maintaining jobs, building local economies in the north and supporting strong communities.

Let me give you another quick example of what land and water division does: Through the Great Lakes Local Action Fund—one of my favourites—we're supporting projects across the province that protect and restore our Great Lakes and their watersheds. In February of last year, we launched another round of funding to provide an additional \$1.8 million for local projects. Transfer payment agreements with 36 successful recipients were developed for implementation in fiscal years 2022-23 and 2023-24. This builds on our success in previous rounds where we've supported over 44 community-based projects. It's great to see local Ontarians taking action to protect their environment. We have a myriad of examples of the incredible work that these local organizations do.

The land and water division is also responsible for a number of branches, including Ontario Parks. I said the Great Lakes Local Action Fund was one of my favourites, but if I could be minister of just one thing, I'd love to be minister of Ontario Parks. It's a truly incredible file. It protects, manages and operates more than 340 provincial parks and 295 conservation reserves across the province. It is truly vast, managing over 9.2 million hectares, or approximately just shy of 9% of the province. To give you an idea of just how great that is, it's bigger than the mass of all of Portugal.

In 2022, parks received more than 12.1 million visits—a dramatic increase through the COVID-19 pandemic—7.2 million overnight visits and 4.9 million day visits, took more than 723,000 reservations and brought in more than \$130 million in revenue. To put that number in perspective, consider when we first formed government, that number was around just shy of \$90 million.

We're expanding ways in which Ontarians can enjoy our parks to protect significant natural and cultural

features while providing opportunities for a variety of compatible recreational activities like campground and backcountry camping, fishing, hiking, paddling, boating, cross-country skiing and so much more. In fact, thanks to Collective Arts, you can now enjoy a great lager, and the proceeds go toward tree planting at Balsam Lake, to combat the emerald ash borer impact that they're having there. As the long weekend approaches, I encourage you all to go out and please drink responsibly.

Additionally, we've also, for the first time in over 40 years, launched a new operating park that's going to offer four-season facilities and recreational activities, including swimming, hiking, cross-country skiing, adding another 250 campsites to the Ontario Parks system. Stay tuned for a very exciting announcement on that soon, but not to be outdone by a recent announcement we made for Ontario's first-ever urban provincial park in Pickering.

#### 1540

I'm going to move on, just cognizant of time here, to our corporate management service division. But before I do, I just want to touch on one last piece on LWD, and that is the work that's done on source protection. We obviously have the best practices for source protection guide and we continue to work with Indigenous partners to do that.

I would also be remiss if I didn't just touch on the first-ever tripartite agreement that we've reached with Mississauga First Nation, Serpent River First Nation and the city of Elliot Lake to co-manage a park in the north. After a series of very tough either closures or where we've saddled the responsibility of those parks onto municipalities—done by the previous government—I'm proud to say that this government has taken a very collaborative approach to work with communities to bring these gems back online and a part of the 115 operational parks that we have, offering incredible recreational opportunities for Ontarians to enjoy.

Moving onto the corporate management division, it's a one window to the ministry and provides strategic administrative support and services to ensure compliance with government legislation, policies and procedures. The division is the primary liaison to central agencies like the Ministry of Finance and the Treasury Board office in the fulfillment of central agency requirements and planning across government, including the development of the provincial budget and long-term strategic plans. I'd be remiss if I didn't thank the team for the work that they do in helping us appear before you today and answering what I'm sure will be some tough questions to come. So thank you to that team.

The drinking water and environmental compliance division is responsible for protecting and supporting clean air, land and water, including safe drinking water, through provincial oversight, and the delivery of compliance and enforcement programs in communities across the province. We are continuing to carry out risk-based compliance and enforcement programs to protect the environment and human health, including taking action to address non-compliance and providing transparency through public reporting.

In addition, we will continue to respond to spills and incidents. In 2022-23 alone, we responded to over 8,000 spills, over 6,500 reports of pollution incidents and almost 3,000 adverse water quality incidents. One of probably the most memorable for me was on Christmas Day, when I got a call from MPP Mamakwa about an issue up north. I'm pleased to say that our incredible ministry team was on the ground within a matter of hours. That's an example of the truly front-line service that this ministry offers, providing on-the-ground supports so that Ontarians can have those assurances that their environment is protected.

Our comprehensive legislation and strong monitoring, reporting and enforcement helps ensure our drinking water is held to Ontario's high safety standards and is among the best-protected in the world. Allow me to give you just a few highlights of the achievements of the drinking water and compliance division for 2021-22, the most recent published data:

- 99.9% of drinking water tests from municipal residential drinking water systems met the drinking water quality standards; these systems serve more than 80% of Ontario's population;

- 99.6% of drinking water test results from non-municipal year-round residential systems met the standards;

- 99.7% of drinking water tests from systems serving a designated facility, such as schools and health care centres, also met the standards;

- 100% of licensed laboratories received an inspection rating above 85%, and 76% of laboratories received a 100% rating in at least one of the two annual inspections; and

- 93.6% of over 31,000 test results met the Ontario standard for lead in drinking water at schools and child care centres.

The environmental assessment and permissions division leads the transformation of Ontario's environmental permissions using a risk-based, client-centred electronic service delivery model. They provide a single point of access for customer service and environmental permissions management in the ministry, as well as delivering the province's environmental assessment program. They also lead the engineering and technical review of all permissions applications to enable sound decision-making that supports compliance and ensures the protection of the environment and human health.

I'd like to tell you a bit of what they've been working on. Our government has been taking action to modernize Ontario's permissions and environmental assessment process, which many of you are familiar about. We are proposing sensible, practical changes that will continue to provide strong environmental oversight while leveraging modern technology to better serve our environment and the people of Ontario. The more modern and streamlined approach will help us tackle the housing supply crisis and build the critical infrastructure we need to ensure safe drinking water and proper waste water services for these growing communities.

By modernizing both environmental assessments and permissions, we will reduce the cost and time clients spend

on fulfilling requirements and obtaining permissions, allowing the ministry to focus our resources on high-risk activities and improved service standards while still ensuring we protect human health and the environment.

Some of the initiatives already implemented include:

- modernizing the existing environmental assessment process for four priority transit projects in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area;

- moving to streamline the permissions process for low-risk municipal sewage works infrastructure by replacing pipe-by-pipe approvals with a single system-wide permissions base—I know from personal experience how much this is benefiting the Cobourg east development, the new water tower to service those growing communities: better service, better drinking water for generations to come;

- expanding operational flexibility and permissions so that approval-holders can make low-risk operational changes such as increasing the amount of material they recycle without having to seek permission from the ministry—imagine that: doing more recycling, better servicing our environment;

- allowing businesses to self-register low- to medium-risk activities on the Environmental Activity and Sector Registry such as construction-related water-taking and waste management activities and exempting low-risk activities instead of requiring a ministry review. Additionally, we will soon be consulting on a new, expanded permit-by-rule approach that will allow more activities to register and begin operations immediately while ensuring strong environmental standards requirements continue to remain in place to protect the environment and human health.

I would add just one quick example of how technology is better servicing our environment: If you look at our excess soils regulations that have come, over great feedback and great engagement with Ontarians, to track movement of fill and soil so that Ontarians can have confidence knowing that the movement of that soil meets high standards. I have a great personal anecdote I'll share later from my own riding.

The environmental sciences and standards division monitors air, water and land throughout Ontario. They support a number of activities the ministry undertakes to help improve air quality, including developing new air standards and monitoring ambient air industrial emissions—I would like to thank them for the work they did on SO<sub>2</sub> regulations in Sarnia; they lead fieldwork using specialized equipment, including real-time monitoring equipment, to identify, monitor, analyze and report data for pollutants throughout what I believe is 36 ambient air quality monitoring stations across Ontario, data accessible 24/7—develop up-to-date, science-based standards and guidelines to help industry and others take action.

Just to give you a quick example of some of the work that they do, Ontario's air quality alert program notifies the public of instances of poor air quality due to smog-causing pollutants. Thankfully, of course, Ontario has dramatically improved air quality over the past number of

decades, something I think, in a non-partisan manner, we can all agree is a good thing. The program helps individuals make informed decisions to protect their health by limiting short-term exposure to air pollutants and adjusting outdoor activities.

The air quality health index is a real-time, easy-to-understand scale that helps people relate air quality to potential risks to health. It communicates information to Ontarians live about the health risks associated with air pollution, which includes health messaging for both general and sensitive populations. You can check it out at [airqualityontario.com](http://airqualityontario.com).

Our environmental policy division leads the development of policy that protects the environment, including operational policy and program development and implementation. One thing that they have been working on which has been in the news lately is, of course, our extended producer responsibility—better recycling leading to better recycling outcomes across Ontario, sitting among the highest targets in North America. These changes will also expand the number of things we can put in the blue box and expand service to more communities across Ontario. These changes are coming soon; municipalities will be transitioning their programs to producer responsibility on July 1, 2023. I would also say that this program—the EPR—will save municipalities money.

I hope that gives you a good idea about the breadth and depth of activities and the divisions across the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Of course, the 2023-24 budget has a number of incredible wins for our environment, from the Greenlands Conservation Partnership increase in funding, to a historic investment in caribou, to commitments for species at risk. We have increased the funding for the Ontario Clean Water Agency by \$19 million for the delivery of water and waste water services. They continue to provide training and operational support to municipalities, First Nations communities, institutions and private sector companies. They also continue to expand the scope in services provided to existing clients, and they continue to attract new clients.

#### 1550

This year, our ministry budget has increased by \$46.8 million to \$782.6 million and we'll continue our mandate to protect the environment and build healthier and safer communities. Some of these included additions include that \$14 million I mentioned in the Greenlands Conservation Partnership program. Long-term protection of these natural areas will help reduce flooding, and protect species and their habitats and outdoor recreational enjoyment for future generations. I'm looking forward to elaborating in the Q&A on some of the lands we've protected and the historic ambition we achieved last year. This increase is also primarily responsible for the increase in capital expenditures.

The Greenlands Conservation Partnership is the single-largest fund to support the securement of ecologically sensitive private land in Ontario. The program leverages private and other provincial and non-provincial dollars to secure, restore and manage new protected areas. One of

the things I'm most excited with is that we get a 5-to-7-to-1 return on investment for every one tax dollar we commit.

Moving on, we've had some exciting wins on the COVID-19 Wastewater Surveillance Initiative. I hope Steven, one of our ADMs, will get the opportunity to speak today on the leadership role Ontario has played in North America, if not worldwide, on this Wastewater Surveillance Initiative. I had the opportunity to visit this first-hand in Peterborough.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Waste water samples are analyzed for new—emerging, I should say—COVID-19 variants of concern at all sampling locations across Ontario. The efficiency and improvements we've made in real time over the past number of months are truly incredible. It's a great example of how the Ontario public service and the great men and women who work in our ministry responded to support Ontarians through the COVID-19 pandemic.

I hope these remarks have given you an idea of the breadth of what the ministry does. I look forward to elaborating and zeroing in on a couple of our funding envelopes and the increased funding we've provided to this ministry in this coming year. I'm very excited for our Greenlands Conservation Partnership program, our caribou agreement, what we're doing on recycling and so much more. I appreciate you giving me this opportunity today to present and talk to you a bit about estimates and the great work that the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is doing in Ontario. Thank you very much. Happy to answer any questions you might have.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister.

We will now begin questions and answers in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent members of the committee and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time. As always, please wait to be recognized by myself before speaking. All questions and comments will need to go through the Chair.

For the deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers and staff: When you are called on to speak, if you would give your name and your title each time so that we accurately record in Hansard who we have.

I will start with the official opposition. MPP Tabuns.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Minister, thanks very much for that presentation. I appreciate it. Good to see you.

Good to see you, Deputy Minister, as always. We've spent a lot of time together. It's amazing—probably not as much as you with him, but getting close some days.

In the briefing book, you have key performance indicators on page 17. It shows an aggregate number for reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, but it doesn't break out the different programs that you have put in place. Can you tell us, for each program that you're running to reduce emissions, what the actual performance has been? It's been five years now since your plan came down, so can you tell us in each category that you're investing in what the reductions have been?



**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes, I'd be happy to. I would also add—I mean, I think I'd start at a very high level by saying we're on track to meet our targets. We're responsible, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, for the bulk of Canada's progress to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It's a non-partisan thing. There was good work done through the phase-out at Lakeview, continued through the previous government, and the industrial decarbonization that this government is doing.

If you're interested in specific modelling—and I'll get into some of the key things we've done—I would encourage everyone to review our emissions performance standards ERO public posting, which included updated modelling reflective towards the end of 2022, so quite recent. We're just Q1 into the new 2023 year—Q1 and Q2 behind us. But I think it gives you a really good picture of where we're at.

I'm just going to go and look at what we posted publicly there to our emissions performance standards, which I mentioned, for gasoline and renewable content. For reporting years, we've seen a significant reduction there. We're on track to meet our target of 144 megatonnes. In fact, the modelling shows us it goes to approximately 143.7 megatonnes.

The big things you asked for, what is responsible for that in our plan, are emissions performance standards supporting the industrial coal phase-out, green steel at Algoma and Dofasco. I've often mentioned before that I'm the grandson of a steelworker in the steel sector. I think he would be proud, if he were alive today, to see the securing of those green steel jobs, that a commitment to the environment didn't mean pink-slipping those workers or, even worse, driving those jobs out of Ontario, but that we've secured them in Ontario, producing some of the greenest steel—a cumulative total of six megatonnes of GHG reductions, approximately two million cars off the road with Algoma and Dofasco. That's very significant.

In addition, I would also point to some work we're doing on waste and the circular economy—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Excuse me. I—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Yes, go ahead, MPP Tabuns.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I appreciate you're covering the modelling. Can you tell us, through assessment of fuel sales and other indicators, the actual reduction in GHG emissions for the different programs?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes. So the reporting data, as I mentioned, that's publicly available went from 163.2 megatonnes to 159.4.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Sorry, per program. I understand that. I saw those numbers. I don't have any question about that at the moment. What I'm asking is, for each program that you've invested in, that you've initiated, what are the actual reductions in GHG emissions?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes, but that's what I've told you. Our GHG reductions are going down. I've talked to you about our programs: our programs in clean steel, our historic investment in public transit. This is the largest public transit investment in Canadian history. After years

of dithering and delay, we're actually getting shovels in the ground on public transit that are going to take 28,000 cars off the road alone for the Ontario Line. It's truly remarkable, those sorts of significant investments that we're making. And I haven't gotten to waste yet as well. I'd love to touch on that.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I know you haven't gotten to waste yet, but I have to say, you've previously answered in the House questions about transit initiatives. I actually asked legislative research to tell me when those transit initiatives would really start to kick in and reduce emissions. Most of them won't kick in until 2029 or 2030. So I'm asking—this is 2023; this government has been in power since 2018—what are the actual emissions in each category that you can tell us? I don't want a model. I want to know, based on actual reductions in consumption of fuels, how we have seen reductions in GHG emissions.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes. Again, a good question. You mentioned the public transit initiatives. I would dispute that; we're seeing it live right now on Lakeshore East, for example—two-way, all-day GO that we've done.

Look, I think if it was up to the previous trajectory, I don't dispute that it would take till 2030 and beyond, because previous governments weren't investing in transit. When the opposition held the balance of power, nothing was done to expedite these significant public transit investments and improvements. We'd still be sitting around, wondering how we would address the Ontario Line and how we would get it. I mean, we wouldn't, because it was this government that committed to the Ontario Line and worked collaboratively with the federal government, with the municipalities.

This is a non-partisan, all-level-of-government agreement on this historic plan of Premier Ford's to invest in public transit. I mentioned Lakeshore East, the Northlander—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Minister—

**Hon. David Piccini:** But you had mentioned that these aren't online. The Northlander is coming online; Lakeshore East is online—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns has the floor.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes. Sorry, go ahead.

1600

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Minister, I've asked for concrete numbers. You're talking about projections and you're talking about projects that won't actually yield reductions until the end of this decade, if then, so I'm going to assume that you don't have actual numbers, and I'm going to go on to a second question.

Your plan was supposed to, by 2022, finalize an approach to public reporting, monitoring and evaluating progress against the commitments in the plan that you put out in 2018. So do you have a report on how you will approach public reporting, monitoring and evaluation, as you committed for December 2022—or rather, as your ministry committed five years ago?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes. As I mentioned, public reporting on our modelling and programs we've put in

place was up, publicly available, as of 2022. That touches on the great work that's been done on industrial decarbonization in the steel sector, on our public transit investments, on work we've done on waste. We also, I would add—you spoke about public reporting—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns has the floor.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Will you table that document? The Auditor General couldn't find it. She asked that it be produced in her value-for-money audits. It went to public accounts committee. Public accounts committee said they didn't see it. Can you produce that report that your ministry committed to a number of years ago and was supposed to have been delivered by December of 2022?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Respectfully, I would say a simple google of the EPS report that we saw and tabled in 2022—it was publicly available to all Ontarians. In preparation for this, my staff were able to do it with a google and get it off for me. It's publicly available—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Some—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns.

**Hon. David Piccini:** —and it shows the great work that's been done.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Some people are far more capable with Google than I am, so I would appreciate it if you would table the report so we could see it. You will make a commitment to table the report so we can see it?

**Hon. David Piccini:** What I would definitely make a commitment to is publicly reporting on what we've done. We have 78 data sets now available online, a dramatic increase from when we were first in government. Open data has been truly incredible. It's engaged youth in my riding. I think to the VentureKids initiative and how youth have been able to access and to use that data—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** You had just suggested that I google it. I have suggested, if you can google it, you can produce it. So will you produce it for this committee?

**Hon. David Piccini:** It is publicly available.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Sorry. Will you produce it? Because if you can't produce it, then I have doubts about its existence.

**Hon. David Piccini:** It's publicly available and folks can access that.

What I think is exciting, as I was mentioning, was that it's more than just that; it's the data sets, it's that youth today, the Ontario public, access that raw data with our government's commitment to transparency and open data—

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes. Thank you—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** —just before you take the floor, I just want to remind everyone that all comments should go through the Chair.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes. I apologize, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** So it's clear, Chair, that, either the minister is not willing to produce the report or the report doesn't exist. Because if you tell someone to google it and you ask for it to be tabled, assuming that it would have been findable with an easy Google search, if the minister declines, that says to me it doesn't exist.

So I'll go on to another matter: On page 92, you show a \$425,000 reduction in estimates for the end of time-limited funding for completion of the provincial climate change impact assessment. What does that mean?

**Hon. David Piccini:** It means we're currently reviewing a report that was submitted.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** And what does the \$425,000 reduction have to do with it?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes. I mean, work has been completed—I'll turn it over to the deputy, maybe, to elaborate a little further on that. Deputy?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Deputy Minister Serge Imbrogno.

There was allocation of funding in previous years, so for the last two fiscal years. What you're seeing is that we've paid out that money and there's that reduction in the final year. We've completed the TPA. It's the final amount, so compared to the previous year, there's a reduction, but it's just because we've paid out the TPA.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. So, Chair, they paid out the full amount for the study and that meant that they didn't have to allocate the money in this year's budget, is that correct?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Well, it just shows a reduction from the previous year, because we made the payment, so, when you compare estimates year to year, it looks like a reduction, but it's the end of the transfer payment agreement and we have, as our minister said, received the report.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Okay. The number that we were given last year was \$3 million for that report. Was that what it cost?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I could check.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes. If you could—

**Hon. David Piccini:** Approximately.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** That might have been the upper limit, but I'll give you the exact number.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Yes, I would appreciate the exact number.

When will this report be publicly available? I had asked at a previous committee meeting if the report would be made available to the public any time soon, and, unfortunately, we couldn't be given any assurance whether it would be this year or before the next election. Can we get a sense of when the report, which is now complete, will be available for the public to review?

**Hon. David Piccini:** We're reviewing it right now with the ministry. Our entire team is reviewing it. I can't commit to an exact time. We're reviewing it actively right now.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Will we be able to see it in this calendar year?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Again, we're reviewing this. This is substantial, as you can imagine. If we think just of the breadth of projects in the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program and the massive infrastructure that varies across the province, you can have an idea of the scope of what we've done at a regional level across Ontario. We're currently reviewing it. The team is doing the back-and-forth work, asking clarification questions and reviewing the document today.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Is it the intention of the ministry to actually release this report to the public so they can read it themselves?

**Hon. David Piccini:** As I said, we're reviewing the document right now. We've been very open with Ontarians in terms of investing in infrastructure. In fact, in the last election, we ran on investing in the critical infrastructure we need to support a growing and climate-resilient Ontario. That's why we're making the public transit investments we're making. That's why we've updated waste water and stormwater infrastructure in the province of Ontario. I hope we have the support of the opposition—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns, you have the floor.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I thought it was a simple question: Can we read it this year? There are some things that are trickier, but, again, the minister seems to be declining to answer whether or not the public can read a report that they paid for.

I'll go on to another question. One of the action points in your climate plan was to develop a user-friendly online tool that makes practical climate change impact information available for the public and private sectors. I asked last November the status of that online tool, given, again, it has been five years. The staff who were here responded, "We are continuing to work on that design.... We've also contracted with York University for the provision of regional climate data."

At the time we had estimates last year, there was no projected date for completion. I'd like to ask now: What is the status of the online tool that was promised in 2018 and what is the expected date that the public will be able to access this information?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I just wanted to mention—the impact assessment was significantly below budget. I wanted to get that on the record, Chair, and again just elaborate on the breadth of regional infrastructure nuances across Ontario and going through that.

On the York University climate data portal, that provides, today, high resolution and high-quality climate-projection data that is specific to Ontario and its regional geography—in fact, that portal upgrades to improve the functionality and understanding, have been supported through a transfer payment agreement from our ministry.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** When will this online tool be available to the public—a promise that was made five years ago?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I believe it's available right now through York University's Ontario Climate Data Portal.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** It's available now?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Again, supported through our ministry.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** It is now public?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes, publicly available.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Can you provide us with the link so that we can access it?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Again, I mean, it's publicly available and I would encourage folks to go and access that.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Can you give us the name of it so that I can google it while I'm here?

**Hon. David Piccini:** York University's Ontario Climate Data Portal—OCDP.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** No, not York University's, yours—the one that you committed to, the online tool that would be available to the public.

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**Hon. David Piccini:** I think, though, it's important to note that government alone doesn't solve climate change, and I told you we work collaboratively. We work with York University on the climate data portal and—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I'm quite well aware the government is not going to solve everything. I just know that in your climate plan that you produced five years ago, you said that there would be an online tool available to the public so that they could look at practical climate change impact information, and it would be available for the public and private sectors.

York University does wonderful work. I have no doubt about that. But I asked last fall when this tool would be available. It has been about six months. Is it available?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Chair, I just want to go on the record here stating that the Ontario government committed to a data portal that we've supported, working collaboratively with York University, and that it's the NDP's position to duplicate that and do something again.

I think Ontarians—we made a commitment to transparency. We're working with our world-class research institutes to produce this portal. It is online, live today, and the NDP want us to go back and duplicate this. Very concerning.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns?

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Can we have the address or the name of that portal again so I can look at it?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Again, Chair, it's York University's Ontario Climate Data Portal. The acronym is OCDP. For this sort of tool and others, we're working collaboratively to tackle climate change, working with our world-class research institutes. We've worked with them on COVID waste water sampling, working with partners in public health. This is a whole-of-government approach. How did we protect almost half a million acres of protected area last year? It was through working with the nature conservancy—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I appreciate the minister giving me a clue as to finding the climate data. The Navius modelling: Can you tell us what that cost and what inputs went into it? And can we, the public, have access to those inputs so we know the assumptions upon which the modelling was based?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes, the Navius modelling, I think, speaks—as I’ve always said, Ontario’s commitment to reduce GHGs is leading the nation. It’s great work that 86%-plus of Canada’s progress has been a result of Ontario, but it’s not the important piece there. It is not I who said this; this has been validated by Navius. There is—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Tabuns, go ahead.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Can you tell us what it cost? We’re at estimates. It’s your spending; it’s your budget.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes, absolutely. Before I turn it over to the deputy and, perhaps, ADM Wood, I would just say it’s important to note that our data has been independently modelled. It’s been validated, I should say, our modelling, to show that our plan through industrial decarbonization, through circular economy, looking at means of production, is working and is arguably one of the few in North America that have been validated to exceed our targets.

I’ll turn it over to Deputy Imbrogno, MPP Tabuns, just to elaborate a little more.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** What did Navius charge you for independently modelling?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Thank you for the questions. Through the Chair: I can get Alex to come up and give you the numbers.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Fine by me.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** We use the Navius model—it’s a well-respected model that we input information in—but they also have, as part of the modelling, the information across the economy. So they provide that value and we use their model to run our various scenarios—

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Sorry; do you use their model or do they independently—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you. The time is up.

Now we move to the independent member. You have 10 minutes, MPP Schreiner.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I appreciate the opportunity to ask questions, and particularly the minister and ministry staff for being here to answer some questions. I was going through the ministry briefing booklet. It did mention the government’s environment plan a few times and it referenced 3 things in that environment plan, but I was looking for a line item within the estimates of money spent working on the environment plan.

The reason I ask this question—and I couldn’t find that, so maybe there’s some details that just aren’t in the briefing book that we have—is that in 2019, when the Auditor General’s report evaluating the government’s environment plan came out, it was highly critical, frankly. It said the government’s plan would not meet—and there was no credible plan to meet—the 2030 emissions targets, which had been watered down.

Your predecessor—not the current minister, but your predecessor—said that it was a living document, it was a plan that was a work in progress, and that there would be

updates made to the plan. So I’m just curious, because I haven’t been able to find anything here around updates that have been made to the plan or budgets associated with updating the plan—maybe that’s within salaries and benefits, but I’m just curious if any work has been done on updating the plan.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes. I think my predecessor was absolutely right: a living document. As I mentioned, updated modelling, publicly available and shared in 2022, really speaks to the new investments this government has made—new policies, new programs, like electric vehicle production and what we’re doing in EVs, like green steel industrial—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner? Minister, MPP Schreiner has the floor.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I appreciate that, Minister. And when you say it’s been updated on the ERO, is that the ERO posting 019-5769 on the EPS program, or is it another posting?

**Hon. David Piccini:** It was on the EPS program, correct—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** It was that particular one.

**Hon. David Piccini:** And when you spoke about, MPP Schreiner—because you asked about some of the updated pieces. We updated the EPS program to meet updated federal benchmarks out to 2030. We very much felt that, per the living document nature, it would be an appropriate place to embed that, to put it there, to show Ontarians we’re constantly updating our—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner?

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thanks, Minister. I appreciate the fact that you’ve updated the EPS program, and it does go into a fair amount of detail in that regard.

One thing I can’t find in this ERO posting—and maybe it’s just hard to read—is a detailed sector-by-sector analysis. So: “This is how much from transportation emissions; this is from building emissions; this is from each particular category”—the actual emissions reductions. Is that available?

**Hon. David Piccini:** If you want to dive into some of the specifics on what accounts for our emissions, we know transportation is, approximately 31%; industry, 27.3%. Transportation—why did we make that big investment in public transit? That’s a classic reason why. Why are we reducing—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner, go ahead.

**Hon. David Piccini:** —I should say, because of transportation. Industry, as I mentioned, Algoma, Dofasco—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister, MPP Schreiner has the floor.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thanks, Minister. From reading that, though, it’s my understanding that those are the actual percentages of emissions right now. Is that correct? That’s how I read that chart.

**Hon. David Piccini:** That’s looking at the subsectors of where our emissions are. And then you said, forward-looking, what’s government doing? And I’ve answered your question. I’ve said, forward-looking, recognizing

where those emissions are coming from, we're taking meaningful action on transit. We're taking meaningful action to support the transportation sector to move goods. We're taking meaningful action on industrial decarbonization, as I mentioned, with Algoma and Dofasco.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I just think it would be useful for the public if it was broken down, not only emissions by category, but emissions reductions by category as well, so we can see where we're making progress moving forward.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I'm going to shift. I too want to ask a few questions about the climate impact assessment, because I know in questioning during question period, in particular, when I've asked about climate action, you've talked about the climate impact assessment. I even think a few times you said that by the end of the year, last year, that it would be ready. It's not yet, and I understand the ministry is evaluating it.

I'm curious why it's been delayed. The people of Ontario have made a pretty significant investment in developing this tool. You've highlighted many times why this tool is important. I'm just curious why the delivery of it has been so delayed.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes. I think the breadth of this report—it's looked at infrastructure, as I've already mentioned, food and agriculture, people and communities, natural environment, business and the economy, engaging with subject matter experts, Indigenous leaders, other key sectors. It's not submit it and walk away; it involves a relationship, following up, asking questions, seeking clarification on submissions that were made. We're currently reviewing that so that we can truly understand the breadth of work that was going into it. You mentioned it was significant, and it is—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner, go ahead.

**Hon. David Piccini:** —and that's why we're taking the time properly.

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**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Great. Thanks, Minister. I'm curious because the Financial Accountability Officer did a fairly detailed and significant impact assessment on public infrastructure alone. Certainly not as comprehensive as what I'm assuming this tool is going to be, but still a pretty world-recognized and world-praised assessment of at least the climate vulnerabilities of provincial and municipal public infrastructure. I think it took a couple of years to put that together, and that's a highly useful tool, I believe, in terms of us being able to evaluate the financial risk we face because of the climate crisis.

So I'm just curious, if they could do it—even if it's a smaller scope, in a couple years—why the ministry hasn't been able to deliver at least anything publicly to help us assess climate risk, climate impacts.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Look, as I mentioned, the scope of this is far greater than that. This is a tool that we worked on extensively over the last year. Let's not forget there was a global pandemic that occurred through this. I respect the

work that all independent officers of this place do, and I read through that with great interest. I think, MPP Schreiner, if we're to be honest with ourselves on the importance of that infrastructure, that's why we've made the significant commitments to infrastructure. This province was living in the past when it came to water and waste water infrastructure, when it came to public transit—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Do you mind if I ask my next—yes, sorry. I know we just have limited time, so sorry. Yes, absolutely.

Is there any preliminary information that you can provide from the climate impact assessment? The reason I ask this is the financial risk, according to the Financial Accountability Officer, of just limited amounts of public infrastructure—\$26.2 billion over the next seven years—means that municipalities and the province itself have some pretty important decisions to make to save this province money and to make sure we're able to withstand the impacts that we're already feeling. Talk to people in the Ottawa River valley or other places.

Is there any preliminary information that can be released so municipalities, and we as the province, can better plan and be more resilient and help us save money?

**Hon. David Piccini:** It's a great question, and I will touch on that. I think I want to state the obvious, given today, that two, three, four levels of government don't protect us from climate change—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Hon. David Piccini:** —and that's why we made the move that we've done with the region of Peel. I think that's a prime example, to the point you made about fiscal responsibility. It has shown us, MPP Schreiner, that the province has a relatively high capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate change. But as you know and as you've stated in the Legislature, it is unevenly distributed across the province of Ontario. That's why the government has focused a number of our infrastructure investments—while we continue to assess this report, we also do recognize that point that you've made, focusing regional infrastructure investments on underserved communities like mine that have been ignored for decades.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner, go ahead.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Yes, I know my time is almost up, so I'll catch some of these in the next round. But I just want to make sure it's on the record that the people of Ontario have paid for this, and I think we need this information sooner rather than later. So I would hope that the ministry could expedite its—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, MPP Schreiner. Now we move to the government side. You have 20 minutes. MPP Yakabuski.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you, Minister, for joining us today. I must begin by agreeing with you 100% on the most enjoyable part of your ministry being the parks section. I'm sure that you and I and most people here would rather be in Algonquin Park right about now than sitting in this very hot room. However, it is what we do.

My question is not about parks, but it is about emissions standards and our performance on our climate change strategy and plans for Ontario. In spite of the fact that we're doing some tremendous things—we're leading the world in EV battery production with the contracts that we have signed with various automotive manufacturers, most recently Volkswagen, to be the world leader in producing electric batteries for electric vehicles, tapping the resources of the north and putting them together, joining them with the industrial might of the south, which is going to make Ontario and, therefore, Canada, a leader in this regard, among the other things that you have talked about, which is the green steel and all of that.

On the fuel standards: I mean, I'm not going to Algonquin Park on my way home, but I will be driving home later today, as I do on most Thursdays. I'll be on the Don Valley Parkway and possibly the 401 or up to the 407—whatever I do, but probably the 401—and I'll be sharing that road and that highway with literally tens of thousands of other vehicles. Even though we are leading our world in projections for electric vehicle production and everything else, most of those vehicles will be fuelled by either gasoline or diesel. Sitting on the 401 going 20 kilometres an hour is certainly not the most efficient way, but it is what it is.

We're making those changes to our transportation network and bringing in more rapid transit, more GO trains and everything else to make it more efficient, but we do still have the reality of burning fossil fuels on our highways, so I do have a question here which is about our clean fuels, which is part of our emissions performance standards which are on the website. The program is on the website, available to the public, and thank you for that.

I'll just put on my glasses so I can actually read this better.

Working with industry partners, Minister, to create emissions performance standards is important, as transportation is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Canada and here in Ontario. Furthermore, our province is large, with residents spread across a geographic area that is bigger than most countries. Transportation of goods and services is vital to our economic prosperity, but it is also important to protect our air quality for both human health and the environment.

I understand that your ministry has recently worked to make fuel more efficient and emit fewer greenhouse gases, and to create an Ontario-specific emissions performance standard. Can you please further elaborate on what the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks has done to reduce emissions specifically from transportation?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes, thank you very much. You touched on a number of things that the government is doing. I think you heard it in some of the questions posed to me earlier: "This won't happen till then. Public transit won't happen till then." So what, we don't do it? "The Ring of Fire might not happen till"—so what, we don't do it?

It's this government, it's this Premier, that has said we're building public transit and we're intensifying

around public transit. It's this Premier who has said it's not going to be rebates for the most affluent. We're going to build EVs. We're going to support them with good-paying union jobs in Ontario. We're going to back it up with the first-ever Critical Minerals Strategy in the north that's going to harness that. Yes, it's going to be tough to do it, but if we took that attitude, it would never get done.

If we work with Indigenous communities, like Marten Falls and Webequie—I signed off on their terms of reference. Working with them, we're going to get the job done. Why? Because standing before those Indigenous leaders, the prosperity it's bringing for their community, listening—it's not easy. I think JoAnne and Chief Michano of Biigtigong with Generation Mining's latest project told us: Sometimes there are tears in the room, sometimes there are difficult conversations, but at the end we emerge together and stronger, and that's because we showed up to play.

You know, if I had never put on my soccer cleats and put on the jersey and I just sat back, I would have not gone anywhere. I could stay in bed in the morning and never get out and not do anything. But I'm proud to be in cabinet, working with a Premier who decides we're going to get out of bed in the morning; we're going to make an effort to build EVs, to unlock the potential of the Ring of Fire; to build public transit and to not be caught up in the decades and myriads of dithering and of NIMBYism that just crippled this province's might and our success.

On EPS: We know, as I mentioned, the transportation sector accounted for 31%—approximately 47.2 megatonnes—of our greenhouse gas emissions in 2020, and it has decreased by 18% since 2005. We regulate the amount of renewable content in gasoline and diesel used or sold in Ontario through the cleaner transportation regulation. It was announced—I think it was in November 2020—that we were obviously going to make that gasoline that drivers use every day cleaner, because it's about a transition and it's about improving our emissions during that transition, and that we would be the first province in Canada to require fuel suppliers to increase that amount in regular-grade gasoline to 15% by 2030.

**1630**

We know that that change alone—members opposite asked about where that takes us. That cumulative change takes approximately 300,000 cars off the road by 2030. It's, again, reflected in our modelling. It's going to attract investment in ethanol production, create jobs in rural communities like mine and assist the biofuel and agricultural sectors. Many of you here today serve communities that have robust agricultural sectors. It's important work that has been done. I think this Premier recognizes it's a transition, recognizes that environment, it's not an either/or; it's an and, and it's an and that includes the jobs of Dofasco and Algoma, it's an and that includes getting shovels in ground on public transit.

It's not easy. We all read the newspaper; we see the challenges in getting transit built. But consider, if we'd done one kilometre since—I think it was Mayor Lampert who first started the TTC or had a role in that. If we'd just

built one kilometre since then, we would have 70 kilometres of public transit—10 kilometres—imagine what we would have in this province.

I think anyone who has travelled internationally knows that our world-class city of Toronto, which is a leader, pales in comparison to comparative jurisdictions like Tokyo, Singapore, Hong Kong, New York and I think to other cities. We have to get the job done, and that's what Premier Ford is doing, recognizing the forgotten communities of Scarborough, recognizing people in communities like Northumberland, who never—wanted to take public transit, were forced to hop in their car. We don't forget. MPP Smith, MPP Flack, MPP Bresee, we have to hop in our cars in our communities, as do the farmers, as do so many. So many of us have to hop in our cars, but now, the people of Northumberland, thanks to Premier Ford and Metrolinx's latest pilot, can access Commuter Connect on demand in Northumberland.

Had we just said, "We're not going to have GO till whenever; let's just not do it. We're not going to see those benefits till whenever," boy, would that have been a poor outcome for the people of Northumberland. But we said yes. It will take time to get GO, and I'm still pushing to bring GO out to Northumberland, but we're going to assess demand and where those clusters are. We're not going to build a railroad to nowhere, we're not going to do with the previous NDP-Liberal government did in Barrie, for example, with a massive parking lot, paved. Look at the Orbit today, what's happening, the intensification around transit. Look at what that proposal is, with mixed-use and commercial. It's truly incredible.

So thank you for the question. We're having cleaner transportation, fuel, with the standard, and doing so much.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I just have one follow-up for now, Minister. You talked about this being a collaborative effort. Can you tell us a little bit about the consultation that you would have had with the industry before introducing these regulations for emission performance standards?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Oh, absolutely. We consulted with key stakeholders and the public with a regulatory proposal and the ERO, a 45-day ERO posting. We conducted stakeholder consultations between March 2019 and June 2019.

The important note, not just those stakeholder consultations, but the ERO—the Auditor General, who has been name-dropped here, said it's not just about the ERO posting; it's issuing a decision, it's doing something about that, and this government has tackled the stale decision notices—I think 90%-plus improvement.

So, yes, you have to work actively and consult with industry. You can't just regulate and then turn your back.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, Minister. I'm now going to—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Flack?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Yes, Chair, if I could ask you to pass that on to MPP Flack. He's anxious.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** Thank you, Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words to complement—

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Flack, just one second.

May I ask the opposition members to lower their volume, please? Because we need to focus on the main question and answers.

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Okay. Thank you very much.

MPP Flack, go ahead.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** To the Minister, I appreciate your comments. I guess, coming from Elgin–Middlesex–London, I recognize some of your points about transportation. But in particular, in my riding, as I think everybody knows, we're going to have a significant investment with Volkswagen in the coming—it's started now, but by 2027, we're going to hopefully be producing batteries.

The manufacturing sector is a crucially important part of this province's economy but also is one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gas. As such, that sector also, coming from it, employs thousands upon thousands if not millions of people. It's crucial to our economy. So what are you going to be doing, working with these manufacturers, to lower greenhouse emissions, number one, but in balance, also protecting the jobs that are created—good-paying jobs, salaries, benefits, pensions? It's a balancing act. I know it's tough. What are you doing to help support that?

**Hon. David Piccini:** It's a good question, MPP Flack. Thank you for your work. What are we doing? We've got good MPPs like you who are bringing municipal leaders to the table and working hard on the Job Site Challenge to identify industrial-ready properties. I've launched my own in my own community, actually. I think—

**Mr. Rob Flack:** I've got four more.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Good man—I think that's important.

I think we saw the pendulum swing when we said we were going to bring back manufacturing jobs to the province of Ontario. For too long, the environmental movement was defined, for folks in my community, by utter decimation of good manufacturing jobs. I do think we all have a role to play in climate change and in fighting climate change and in doing our part for the environment. But you can't do it when you leave generations and leave swaths of our population behind, which is tangibly what was happening in rural Ontario: a Kraft plant closure in my own community, countless other examples.

Consider the fact that when Reuters had that report in 2018, they said zero jobs, zero dollars from the estimated \$300 billion in EV market would come to Ontario. You fast-forward to today: \$25 billion in Ontario thanks to the work Premier Ford, Minister Fedeli and this government have done. It's a renaissance. We're seeing those sorts of jobs come back. We're seeing EV jobs. It's backed up by a clean energy sector, a stabilization of electricity rates. We've made it easier to produce that power.

When we toured Dofasco and Algoma, Ron there at Dofasco and many of the workers came up and said, "You're the first Premier to put on a hard hat and get in

here and understand what it's like in the work that we do." I think that alone exemplifies the sort of approach you asked are we taking. It's not about doing regs in a backroom and then throwing them out to the public and hoping that it works; it's about sitting down with industry, understanding turnaround times, understanding the investments that they're making and working hand in hand. What does that mean? We're producing the greenest steel. What does that mean? Robust regulations in Sarnia on SO<sub>2</sub>, and we've all done it working with industry.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** Follow-up question—if I can be like the senior member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, I'll have a follow up: Waste water and stormwater are crucial. Since I got into this job, I—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Is he calling you old?

**Mr. Rob Flack:** No, "the senior member."

I can't get over, since I got in this job, how much time I've spent in my riding with waste water and stormwater issues. There are 10 municipalities, six of which buffer, come right onto, Lake Erie, which is a major part—and the whole Great Lakes basin and Lake Ontario basin are crucial, obviously, to our economy. Balanced with that, that's where most of the people live. That's where most of the manufacturing takes place. It's crucially important to our economy, also crucially important to our environment.

I think it was mentioned earlier: The Financial Accountability Officer reported on the cost impacts of extreme weather on water infrastructure and stated that there's much more work to be done. As such, we need to protect our towns and cities.

What investments has this government made to improve municipal waste water and stormwater management? Because it is a growing issue as we grow the population—three million more people in the next 10 years, 1.5 million more homes—it's going to become even more important to get it right.

1640

**Hon. David Piccini:** That's a really good question. How much time do I have, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Four minutes.

**Hon. David Piccini:** A really good question. I think we know, and the Premier has acknowledged, that we welcome immigration—like my grandfather, who chose a better future in Canada, in Ontario. We welcome it, and we understand the practical reality that it's happening and it's coming. And it's not just 40%, 50%, 60%; of the 500,000 that came last year, it's over 450,000 who came to the province of Ontario. That's a reality. We need that. The thing I see now—a marked change in my community—is "help wanted" everywhere. We see it in the resurgence of manufacturing.

So we need that immigration, but we can't take the approach of the previous government and the 15 years, where we're not making these infrastructure investments. We ran on a very simple plan to build—a plan to build critical infrastructure. I would acknowledge the \$15 million this government committed in stormwater and waste water infrastructure. We took a really innovative approach to look at quality and quantity in the discharge

and focus our efforts on those rural municipalities that were really struggling, while also supporting cities like Hamilton and Toronto with significant investments. I remember being with the former mayor of Hamilton to make that announcement and with former Mayor Tory to make that announcement in Toronto.

But what does that mean for a place like Cobourg? A new water tower to support Cobourg east development; the supply of housing that is now coming online; the supply of purpose-built rentals, with the Elgin Park redevelopment for deep affordable housing, done by the county. The toilets have to flush and the water has to turn on, and we take for granted that that's clean water; we take for granted that when we flush the toilet it's looked after. The great men and women at Lakefront Utilities and the work that they're doing in my own community—that investment has helped build a second water tower in Cobourg. That would not have happened if not for Premier Ford's leadership, if not for this government making those investments in water and waste water.

So that's really important, and the connection I'm making here is that we have a responsibility to this growing province to build modern and reliable infrastructure to support those growing communities. That is building a climate-resilient community. That is building a cleaner, safer community with cleaner drinking water.

Technology is constantly evolving. I just had a great meeting with someone on bio-organisms and how you can better find efficiencies in your waste water treatment plants. We're having great meetings with Ontarians on the technology that they can bring. Consider the fact that smartphones—this—the evolution that technology has brought us, the ability for real reporting and monitoring: again, investments we made, this government, in real-time monitoring for stormwater and waste water and for bypass overflows. That's work that this government has done, and it's really important to make those investments. I'm very proud of that work to support growing communities like yours and mine.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** Okay. I guess we're over to—

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** All right. Thank you, Chair. Through you to the Minister: Thank you, Minister, for your presentation. I'm on the Great Lakes investments, and I have a question for you, because my riding is situated—the south part of it is on the Great Lakes, as you know, and so is Pickering and Ajax. Can you share with the community some initiatives the ministry is undertaking to keep the Great Lakes healthy and thriving for future generations, like my granddaughters, Annette and Sophia?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Absolutely. Great question, and I hopefully will respond in the next part: improving municipal waste water and stormwater management, reducing excess algae, reducing plastic pollution and excess road salt, undertaking meaningful local action with the Great Lakes Local Action Fund, strengthening First Nation and Métis engagement. Think to Oneida, what we did at the Great Lakes Guardians' Council, on the Thames River—over \$1 million of investment there, helping



communities increase resilience to climate change. Under the agreement for—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. The time is up.

Now we move to our second round of questioning. We will start with the official opposition. You have 20 minutes.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you very much, Minister. It's great to see you—doing a great job so far.

I have seven questions, so I want to let you know that I'm going to ask them quickly and expect a quick answer. You could probably use a break too, by the way. You've been talking quite well and quite long. Get that guy a glass of water, that's what I have to say.

I want to focus on the Emissions Performance Standards Program, which really, to me, I would like to call your carbon tax for the industrial sector. If you look on page 141, it seems to me that the amount there is a placeholder. So my question very specifically is two things: How many industrial units have registered, and how much have you collected in the penalties for exceeding the limits?

**Hon. David Piccini:** A good question. I'm going to refer it to ADM Wood, just to touch on what was collected. Look, we have to meet a federal benchmark. You can choose to do it with or without industry, and this government has taken an approach to working actively with industry, as I mentioned, reflecting Ontario's priorities and Ontario's industries.

ADM Wood, could you share the amount in year 1?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** The question very specifically is the number of facilities that have registered and how much, if at all, have you collected from any of these facilities for exceeding the limits?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Assistant deputy minister Alex Wood of the climate change and resiliency division. Currently, we have 206 facilities registered in our program. In terms of the proceeds from the program itself, the annual compliance cycle for the 2022 year hasn't fully played out yet, so we have not, in fact, received any proceeds in relation to the program at this point.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Okay, thank you for that. And do you have a target number for how many facilities you expect should be registering in this program?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Well, what we know is that the program, the regulation, has two classes, essentially. If you emit 50,000 tonnes or more, you are required; you are covered by the regulation. Facilities between 50,000 and 10,000 tonnes can voluntarily comply into the program. It's hard to estimate how many would choose, but right now, we have 206 covering those two categories registered in the program.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Okay. I see, again in the briefing book, that you have what I would consider a placeholder. What is your expected revenue for this program? You must have a sense of what it should be. And the second question is, how will these revenues be used?

**Mr. Alex Wood:** On the second question, those decisions are actively being discussed right now.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Do you want to answer the projected—

**Mr. Alex Wood:** Yes, the overall projected revenues for the program are \$2.2 billion. That's out to 2030, so that will be the cumulative number. But the minister wants to add—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Yes, thank you very much for that.

**Hon. David Piccini:** And just on the proceeds, we're having really good conversations now with the financial sector, taking a sector-by-sector look at those sectors that are indeed paying the most into the program. Of course, they would want to know that proceeds are going to help decarbonization. I think if you look to, for example, what Dofasco has done, they've said, "Look, we've made that commitment to electrify the arc furnace. We've made that commitment with the EAF DRI and we'd like to know that you're working with us on it." And we are. They have a receptive government in Premier Ford and the minister and me and we have had numerous meetings on designing this program, and we expect it will come out this year, MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you. I appreciate that. So you said that you expect it will come out this year—

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** —so will we be able to track not only the revenues collected, but how these are being used? Because I'm assuming, from what you just said, that these revenues will be used for climate or carbon-reducing initiatives.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes, the EPS proceeds program rolled out this year and communicated publicly with Ontarians.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Okay, thank you. Now I just want to turn to—I guess it would be the land and water division that you referenced. The ministry developed a policy for staff to consider the cumulative impacts of air pollutants from multiple sources when you're looking at environmental approvals for new expanded facilities, specifically in Hamilton, Burlington and Sarnia. Can you tell me how many times you've used that assessment tool, how many times you've approved and how many times you've denied environmental organizations that have been looking for approvals using that new policy?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes, so I'll bring our ADM to—well, I'll turn it over to the deputy in a moment here. But I would first say that ambient air quality is improving in the province of Ontario, and has improved significantly from the air quality that my grandfather breathed in Hamilton to the air that my father breathed in Hamilton to the air that I breathed today when I was at the Collective Arts announcement.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** And your children.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Hopefully. I hope so. It's also up to my wife.

We have those ambient air quality monitoring stations across Ontario. They are reported publicly. I'll turn it over to Alison—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Okay, thanks, Minister. I'm looking for a very specific number. If you can tell me how many

times you've used that assessment tool to look at the cumulative impact of particulate.

**1650**

**Ms. Alison Pilla:** Hi, I'm Alison Pilla. I'm the ADM for the policy division. I appreciate your question. I know there's a lot of focus on Sarnia and the air quality in Sarnia, and the ministry spends a lot of time working with both Sarnia and First Nations in the Sarnia area around impacts of air pollution from industry and other sources in the area.

The cumulative impact policy is a policy that we consider on an ongoing basis as we're doing assessments. It really relates to new impacts in the area; it doesn't go back retrospectively and look at industry that's already there. There haven't been a lot of new industrial builds in Sarnia recently. It is something that we look at generally in terms of what communities are exposed to in terms of multiple pollutants.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** All right. I appreciate that. Maybe if we could turn to Hamilton specifically. I know you just visited Hamilton in an area that has historically been a hot spot for incidents of asthma and cancers. It's an industrial sector right in the heart of a neighbourhood that, in many instances, suffers all the other social determinants of health—low income. It's a community that has been put upon, if I could say, by having to live side by side with industry.

For example, the city of Hamilton is the fifth highest in the province when it comes to fine particulate matter, the readings there, and I think it's also fifth when it comes to nitrogen dioxide. These are not good numbers for residents who raise their kids and live in that neighbourhood—there are schools in that neighbourhood.

My question was really specifically about Hamilton. This notion of cumulative impacts is something that the community understands because they suffer from it, but they are having a hard time connecting the dots and tracking how often you use this new policy that would benefit them.

I would very even specifically talk about a company called Rain Carbon, which is a coal tar refinery in that neighbourhood that is looking for approvals. A coal tar refinery, as you can imagine, creates emissions that are not pleasant. Is this a policy that you would be using to assess this Rain Carbon company that's looking to extend their operations?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I would say—I mean, everybody has got abatement plans on their own specific projects. Recognizing industrialized communities that ADM Alison Pilla spoke to—as I said, we've worked with industry on installation of scrubbers, for example, in Sarnia; and at Dofasco, the electric arc furnace—again, working with industry. It's taking a very collaborative approach to working with industry to improve air quality, to decarbonize and to improve that air quality.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that answer, and I appreciate that it's a very specific question, but I'm not hearing a specific answer, with all due respect. So I would like to maybe put that in writing

at a later time to see if you can follow up with a specific number to the question, because I think the people of Hamilton and that community would like an answer.

I'd like to turn now to some issues around the Endangered Species Act. We know that you have opened the act and amended the act to enable proponents to pay a fee—we call it pay to slay, but I'm sure that's not how you refer to it—a pay-to-slay charge for conservation, a fund that is specifically for when you give permits to proponents that will be impacting either the species or their habitat.

My question very specifically is: You have the Species at Risk Conservation Fund. Where can I find that amount or how much you've collected in the briefing that you've presented?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I'll answer that question directly on the amount. I'll just remind new members of the committee that saddling proponents with overall benefits—we're not talking about mitigating adverse effects on a said project, but an overall benefit. Saddling them with a back-and-forth, multi-year—looking at an agency that takes a step back and looks at a systems approach was a fundamentally good thing. Not my words; the words of Environmental Defence. Taking that real systems approach that's led by scientists is the right thing.

Of course, standing up an agency I wish we could do overnight, but we are working diligently to stand up that agency. We have an active board right now and have collected close to \$1 million, if I'm not mistaken, into the agency.

MPP Shaw, we also made an additional commitment in budget 2023 of \$5 million. This is a significant increase in funding for endangered species. This government recently announced removing the bald eagle from the endangered species list. We've made a historic agreement for caribou: \$29 million for boreal caribou. Not only are we working with SARSP funding—species-at-risk stewardship funding—we're also working with the Species Conservation Action Agency to really take a systems-based approach to improve habitats for species. I really look forward to the work that they are going to do as an agency.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** When will this remediation work start, that you're speaking about? You've collected \$1 million; is what you've said? Will we be able to see where you've collected this money from and what were the species that were impacted? When will we be able to follow the remediation work that's happening, specific to the way that you have amended the Endangered Species Act, not in general? The caribou issue is commendable, but it seems to me that that's not the question. I was asking very specifically about—

**Hon. David Piccini:** Well, I won't want to leave anyone in this committee with the perception that things aren't happening every year. I mean, \$4.5 million has gone out the door this year for species at risk, impacting a number of projects across Ontario. I think some of the things that this ministry really looks to do are focused on the impact.

I'm going to turn it over, just to touch on some of those specific projects—you really want to get a flavour for

that—to Deputy Minister Imbrogno here and perhaps Chloe. I just want everyone to get a specific feel. I've been to a few of the projects myself for a number of the endangered species and their habitat. In Blanding's turtles projects, MPP Smith and I were there. We're actually doing a hatchery release next week in my own community on Lake Ontario. But Chloe, perhaps—

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I'll just start by answering part of your question, MPP Shaw. So this is an agency. It's not the same in terms of consolidation. It's a separate entity, and they'll have their own annual reports and so on. In terms of the transparency, you'll get it from that agency—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Sorry to interrupt you. So the Species at Risk Conservation Fund is managed by an agency? Is that what you're saying?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** Yes, it's an agency.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** And what is the name of the agency?

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** That's the name.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** That's the name of the agency.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** It's the Species Conservation Action Agency. Chloe can talk to you about some of the initiatives that they'll follow.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I'm short of time, so I'm—yes.

**Ms. Chloe Stuart:** Hi. Chloe Stuart, the ADM for the land and water division. I think, Minister, you mentioned some of our favourite projects, which are some of the turtle releases. We could be looking at monitoring grassland habitats in southwestern Ontario, looking at different opportunities to study fish species. Really, we've invested in a wide range of projects over the last 17 years under the stewardship fund.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Those initiatives that you just described, are they funded through this fund that we're talking about?

**Ms. Chloe Stuart:** That is separate. We've got a \$4.5-million-a-year Species at Risk Stewardship Fund that the government delivers through a transfer payment agreement program.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Great, a number. Thank you very much. If you don't mind—I appreciate it—

**Hon. David Piccini:** And another \$5 million through the agency for these projects that they will be undertaking in the coming year or two.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Okay, that's great. I'm going to move on now. What I would like to talk about—I appreciate MPP Flack bringing up the issue of the health of our lakes and how, unfortunately, we continue—we're trying to make changes, but we do continue to treat the lakes like sewers, to be honest with you. We use them for water and waste water, and we're starting to see the cumulative effect of that.

1700

I wanted to turn to the issue of algae blooms, particularly. Right now, we have Lake Scugog, for example, which currently has a confirmed—what do we call it?—incidence of toxic blue-green algae. This is in the Kawarthas. And so my question to you is, are you tracking the economic impact of when lakes now are unavailable for cottagers and boaters—the impact of the damage, the

impact to the species that are in Lake Scugog, for example? How are you monitoring that? What are your metrics to make sure that, when there's these algae blooms, particularly when it's blue-green toxic algae—what are your actions there?

**Hon. David Piccini:** We work closely with public health and you know our beaches are monitored. We've seen a significant improvement over the past number of years. We also partner with partners like Swim Drink Fish, and they've done some great work there, Mark and the team. We've launched the greatest, largest plastic capture cleanup of its kind in Lake Ontario to capture pollutants; as I mentioned, that infrastructure to capture phosphorus discharges. Lake Simcoe—I mean, if you factor—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Yes, that's what I was going to bring up next. That thing that you just talked about, the capture—does that include microplastics?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes, correct. The Seabins are in Cobourg Harbour, among a number—I was there for the launch of Cobourg Harbour, partnering with the U of T Trash Team and U of T to study the origins of those microplastics so that we can work with actual producers. Again, it's a philosophical approach. We're not driving those jobs out. We're saying to them, “How do we reduce that waste that's created and capture the microplastics?” We're the first government to commit to these high targets for circularity and the circular economy as well.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** In your reporting, are you tracking and am I able to find these algae blooms in all of the Great Lakes and in the inland water lakes, like Lake Simcoe? Is there a place where I could see the number of algae blooms and the impact that they're having?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes, they are tracked, and perhaps I'll defer to Deputy Imbrogno. Again, I've worked with the GLIER institute, for example, in Windsor on a number of projects that are tracking algae blooms—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Where can I find that information, Minister?

**Hon. David Piccini:** —and our Great Lakes action fund and our Canada-Ontario agreement with the federal government, who produce a report. That report, as I said, tracks algae blooms and where. We've seen a reduction with tackling that phosphorus discharge into lakes, investing in modern infrastructure. The commitment we made for the phosphorus reduction in Lake Simcoe is the largest phosphorus reduction initiative in Lake Simcoe's watershed's history, and that's a commitment that this government made.

To talk a little bit about the metrics—Chloe, we've had many a conversation about these metrics in the context of the Canada-Ontario agreement and our discussions with the federal government and our American counterparts.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I think Chloe can answer the question about Lake Simcoe and some of the great work we're doing there. In terms of the algae blooms, we definitely track it. We'll get back to you whether it's on our website or the public health units for each area, because it is a health issue and the importance is to make sure that people are aware so that they can take action.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** And if there's any information you could provide us specifically when it comes to—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:**—Lake Scugog. That's just a huge concern for everyone. When we start to see our cottage lakes so early in the season having these outbreaks, where people can't use the water, that's a huge concern. I think that that's something we all need to really be focusing on and understanding, collectively, why this is happening.

Because I only have one minute, I just want to ask you, are you tracking and are you able to tell me what the impact of the Orbit—we talked about the Orbit development—will be on Lake Simcoe? Not even just about phosphorus, but when it comes to road salts—you're planning to build the Bradford Bypass very close to Lake Simcoe. So I'm just wondering if you can talk to me about how this huge development in and around Lake Simcoe will impact the health of Lake Simcoe.

**Hon. David Piccini:** First, if we look at the watersheds, a lot of that is actually—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. The time is up.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Can I ask if the minister—I ran out of time, but that's a question that I ask the minister if he would be prepared to follow up with me in writing on that answer?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Well, it's up to the minister to agree to respond in writing to your question.

**Hon. David Piccini:** I'm happy to connect off-line with MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Okay. MPP Schreiner, go ahead. You have 10 minutes.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I appreciate the opportunity to ask a few more questions. I'm just going to build on some of the questions I asked in the first round.

I think one of the advantages Ontario has is that our grid has been 94% clean. I've heard this minister and other ministers talk about what an advantage it is for us, but I know that, because of the additional use of gas plants recently, we're now under 90% emission-free, and I've seen reports that, with the plan to ramp up gas plants, we're likely going to see a 300% increase in emissions from the electricity sector this decade. I'm wondering how that impacts the environment plan and the province's ability to meet our 2030 targets.

**Hon. David Piccini:** I have to state the obvious here: To be very blunt, we know that the Green Party plan is to shut down nuclear and to crush nuclear in the province of Ontario—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Excuse me. Excuse me.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister, please. MPP Schreiner, you have—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Excuse me. I have to respond to that because I have publicly stated on numerous occasions that I understand that Bruce and Darlington will be refurbished and be a part of Ontario's electricity mix for generations or decades into the future. So I'd appreciate the minister to withdraw just a false comment.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Well, I'm glad we got that clarification, and I hope it would be expansion of nuclear with SMRs and the work that the government is doing—

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Could I just come in really quick?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner. Minister—MPP Schreiner, go ahead.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** It's just a simple question: Has the ministry done any analysis of how the significant increase in fossil-gas-generated electricity is going to impact the ability of the province to meet the 2030 targets?

**Hon. David Piccini:** This government is, through the Ministries of the Environment and Energy, ramping up a supply to support the considerable demand we're going to have with electrification and EVs. That's why we've invested in SMRs. That's why we've—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner, go ahead.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thank you. I'm taking from that answer that there has been no analysis. So then I will follow up: In the first round of questioning, the minister acknowledged that the environment plan is a living document and it will be updated. Can the public expect an update soon? Would the minister commit to an update to the environment plan that will acknowledge or incorporate the changes in the electricity mix and how that's going to affect the ability to meet the 2030 targets? Given the fact that we'll see more emissions from electricity, will there be reductions in other areas? Can you give the public an indication of when that information will be available?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I think we've seen the Pathways report on what we're going to need in the energy mix. What we haven't seen is the support. It's regrettable you voted against SMRs, you voted against expanding nuclear, you voted against measures we've taken to expand hydroelectric. I think to Ranney and Healey Falls: We've doubled capacity with environmental assessment modernization—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner, go ahead. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thank you, Chair. I just want to note for the record that I don't think we're going to get an answer here. I think the public would like an answer because it is such an important issue.

I want to move to—

**Hon. David Piccini:** I gave you one with energy and the Pathways report. We worked very closely on that.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I think I have the floor right now, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner, continue.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Thank you, Chair. I really appreciate that.

We'll move to protected lands, if that's okay. The Auditor General, just a few days ago, noted that, under Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy, the 2020 target to have 17% of land protected—the province has failed to meet that target. Only 10% is protected right now. I was looking through the estimates to see if there was anything the

ministry was doing to address the fact that that target was not met. Would the minister like to talk about the strategy the ministry has to deal with the fact that we failed to meet that target?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I'd love to talk about our strategy to protect biodiversity and expand habitat protection. Not only do we have a plan, but if you look at last year, it's working: 400,000-plus acres of protected habitat. That is more than what the previous government did in the last four years in government, so it's a significant number. Through programs like the wetlands conservation program, we've managed to add the equivalent of I think it's over 11,000 hockey rinks of expanded, improved wetlands habitat in the province of Ontario—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner.  
1710

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** That's great. I appreciate you providing that information. Given that activity, which I appreciate, do you have a specific date of when the 2020 target will be met?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I hope you give me the opportunity here to elaborate, to tell Ontarians the sort of nuance that goes in. Uxbridge, for example: When Mayor Barton and John MacKenzie put their hands up and said, "We can protect an important cohort there," that was not something we had in our plan, but it is something we were able to respond to because Premier Ford committed money into the Greenlands Conservation Partnership program, because we have an ambitious plan for new parks—the first-ever new operating park in over 40 years in this province. That \$14 million that we've committed through the Greenlands Conservation Partnership program in the budget gives us the fiscal flexibility to target areas that we need to protect: Alfred Bog, the carbon sequestration with the peat moss; Monarch Point Conservation Reserve through the South Shore Joint Initiative that protects important migratory bird corridors; the Hazel Bird Nature Reserve, which we've increased by a third in my own riding; Vidal Bay; Boreal Wildlands and so many more.

So when you look to metrics, MPP Schreiner, you said, "How are you going to get there?" Let's look at CPCAD, the database that tracks this federally. Ontario's submission last year was big, and it was among the highest in this nation. As I said, it was more than the last four years of the previous government. I think that really shows this government's commitment and signal to protected areas. Just wait for this year; 2023 is going to be a big year.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Schreiner.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Let's hope so, especially given the fact that we will be losing some protected land from the greenbelt. Let's hope it will be a big year.

I wanted to ask—

**Hon. David Piccini:** Adding to the greenbelt 2,000 acres.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I wanted to ask about Ontario Parks, because we all love Ontario Parks. I appreciate that it's one of your favourite parts of the job, and one of my favourite places to visit every year. One of the biggest complaints that come into my office—I know I've talked

about this with you before—is the fact that a lot of people are having trouble registering for our parks. It's good to know they're popular, but it's frustrating for constituents when they go on the website, literally at the time that they're supposed to be registering, and they don't get their campsite. Can you maybe update us on what steps the ministry has taken to address those concerns?

**Hon. David Piccini:** A really good question, and I appreciate that I owe you a sit-down on this. It's a good question. One of the concerns we had, certainly when I first became minister, was that people had the ability to book for an elongated period of time. What we found statistically is that those bookings would reduce closer to the date. MPP Schreiner, I might decide to say, "Mike, let's go to a park together." We don't know when because of the busy legislative schedule and then we cancel last minute. That was really unfair.

So we looked at our cancellation policy. I called TIAO, the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, and many others to get some feedback. We've modernized that, and that's unlocked approximately—the exact number I'll ask perhaps Chloe to speak to on what that has unlocked, in addition to adding new campsites that we've worked on through capital investments. But that's one of the examples of how we've improved the system.

I would also add, for those wondering, that Ontario is, I've been told—the ministry knows we've had a lot of back and forth on this. We're tied into a system—Camis, I think it is—with Parks Canada and a number of other parks jurisdictions, whereby, when we make an improvement, collectively everyone benefits. It's a bit of a parks' association. So we've certainly—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Hon. David Piccini:** —challenged them in the change we made.

Quickly, I'll turn it over to Deputy Imbrogno just to elaborate on what that change has meant in terms of more campsites.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Could you do it quickly? Because I want to get one more question in.

**Ms. Chloe Stuart:** Yes. Thank you. Chloe Stuart, ADM for the land and water division. Apologies, Minister, I don't have that specific number, but I can tell you that it has been a system we've put in place with our busiest parks, where we've reduced the reservation length to seven days at a time only and then to 14 nights at a number of our other medium-busy parks, and still allowing parks in the north to be 23 nights. That really is seeing an increase in our reservations.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Yes—significant.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Great. I appreciate that. I think my last one is just going to have to be a comment because I don't have time for a question. I'm a big supporter of extended producer responsibility, but I've had constituents raise concerns about beverage container fees. I'm wondering if the ministry would consider working with industry on a deposit return system, which does have much higher diversion rates—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, MPP Schreiner. The time is up.

Now we move to the government side. You have 20 minutes. MPP Bresee.

**Mr. Ric Bresee:** Thank you, Minister, for your comments earlier and your co-operation with this committee.

Minister, as I think you're aware, in 2020, I was a mayor in a small municipality. I was the mayor when we had to sign the emergency orders for COVID. One of the things that this government did during that time in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was to establish the Wastewater Surveillance Initiative to detect the virus that causes COVID-19 in the waste water samples. My municipality was one of the partners in that program. You were collecting those samples through public health units, in co-operation with the university—Queen's University, in our area, certainly. Since 2020, Ontario has committed over \$66 million to funding for that waste water surveillance capacity to enhance the ability for public health officials to provide timely responses to COVID-19.

Minister, that program was incredibly helpful. As I responded to my residents in my municipality with their questions about their safety, about the regulations, about the various requirements that were put in place at the time, I was able to refer back to that data. I know that there's been a number of questions about data being available publicly. Well, that data still is available publicly. I've got it on my phone right this moment. I really appreciated having that data when I was the one responsible to answer the residents' questions, and still have it available to me in my new role.

That water surveillance initiative consisted of a network—an integrated, province-wide sampling and analysis network covering approximately 60% of the entire population, across all the public health units, who really led the charge on this. But again, I have to say it was a partnership with all levels of government—the provincial government, the public health units, the municipal governments, the universities and colleges that were doing a lot of the analysis and sampling work. It was wonderful example of co-operation.

Minister, a little while ago, when you were answering some of your first questions, you spoke of the hesitation of previous governments—of their need to study and study and study, and not actually get any results—and that this government has the ability to actually get things done and move forward with things. It's kind of a cliché, but one of my father's favourite expressions was always: When is the best time to plant a tree? It's 20 years ago. When is the second-best time to plant a tree? That is right now, today.

So, Minister, can you tell me how Ontario's investment in sustaining the waste water surveillance network over the coming year—to keep on tracking COVID-19 trends in communities. And will you be exploring how the system can be used to detect other diseases of concern and make sure that all of our residents are as ready as possible for future public health emergencies?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Thank you very much for that question, MPP Bresee, and for your leadership.

I mean, there's no playbook. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I didn't go to my bookshelf and pull out book number 3, chapter 5, "How to deal with COVID-19." But I think the Premier really showed leadership in how the government responded to that, working very collaboratively. There is no Premier in this province who went out—good and bad—and stood before Ontarians and, in a transparent manner, said, "Here's what we're going to do and here's why we're going to do it," and also went out and communicated and worked collaboratively with partners. A big shout-out to the team at MECP and at health who worked together on the waste water surveillance network.

This comprised a network across 34 public health units. We're investing \$18.7 million in the next fiscal year to sustain this initiative to detect COVID-19 waste water in communities across the province and expanding to look at additional areas of concern. We've spoken with public health units about opioids and other areas of concern. We're continuing to fund sampling at a number of First Nations and high-risk congregate locations, like existing long-term-care facilities, correctional facilities, hospitals, homeless shelters and retirement homes. It's an effective, low-cost, high-volume approach to monitoring for potential outbreaks in communities, and there has been a lot of good work that has gone into it. I must say, I've learned a great deal through this process as minister and I've valued how we can support public health and emerging health threats by leveraging the significant investment we've made, continuing our national and international leadership in this space, providing broad, unique layers of data sets—that you said just now you can access on your phone—and transparent and effective public communication.

1720

I'd like to turn it over to Deputy Imbrogno and ADM Carrasco, who's a real leader on this in working collaboratively to stand this up with our government.

**Mr. Serge Imbrogno:** I'd like to call Steven up. Steven and his team led the work on the waste water surveillance. Also, I think it's internationally recognized, and maybe Steven can talk about some of the work we've done with the CDC, in Europe as well and in Israel. So maybe, Steven, you can talk about all the great work you've done.

**Mr. Steven Carrasco:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Deputy. My name is Steven Carrasco. I am the assistant deputy minister for the drinking water and environmental compliance division. I'm also the chief drinking water inspector for the ministry.

If I can turn your minds back to 2020, when we were in the midst of the pandemic and public health was struggling to keep up with the pandemic, the science table came to the Premier and said, "Look, we have a new technology that we think might help. Can you help invest in it?" They knew that public health was dealing with a lot of things, so they came to the ministry and they asked us, "Will you use your waste water expertise to help us?"

We built partnerships with the Ontario Clean Water Agency, with every municipality that was willing to participate. We built innovative partnerships with the universities. Earlier, the minister spoke about the partnership

and the transfer payment we did with York. That kind of investment allowed us to leverage the innovation from our researchers in Ontario. Their research work has paid off immediately. This is live action and response based on the work that they've done.

They've also moved the ball forward. We met with Israel; we met with Pakistan; we met with Australia; we met with the Netherlands. They were leading the work—as well as the US CDC. I will tell you that Ontario is actually out in front of almost every other jurisdiction in the world in the work that we've done right now. We've built a network which is covering the province: all 34 public health units. We've actually shifted it to a sentinel system, which is what we need at this phase in the fight against COVID. That allows us to test more often in the places that we need to. It feeds directly to every public health unit. We spoke to every chief medical officer of health to seek their advice as to where we go. We spoke to Dr. Moore and to Public Health Ontario. The information that you're seeing on your public health website locally is the work of Dr. Stephen Brown and Sarah Jane Payne at Queen's University, real leaders in the work that they're doing. Public Health Ontario is where the data is available for the whole province, so this information is available for public health to actually help work on dealing with COVID.

The question that was asked about what else we can use this for: This network that is in place will actually help us look at how we deal with future health threats. I will tell you right now, that network is actually monitoring for RSV, something that is not easily testable for and affects children. The way we find out that we have RSV right now is the amount of children that end up in the hospital; this allows us to actually see what's happening in the community. It's involuntary. It's anonymous. Whether you choose to get tested or not, we know what's going on. We're testing for influenza A. We're testing for influenza B. When monkeypox was emerging, we were able to test for it. We're testing for polio virus. As new health threats come on board, we're looking to see whether we can actually use that to inform public health in its planning.

**Mr. Ric Bresee:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Smith.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Thanks, Chair. How much time is left?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Ten minutes.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Ten minutes? Minister, I don't know if you've been in any of the public accounts committee meetings; the NDP typically start off with, "These are some uncomfortable questions and it's not personal," so I have an uncomfortable question for you about Ontario Parks, because they are phenomenal. It's a phenomenal resource. I know this one is going to be a very hard question for you to come up with a satisfactory answer for all of us, but not only are our parks wonderful places to camp, hike, swim and enjoy the great outdoors, but it's also a fantastic place to learn about the natural environment as well. We have a wonderful new way for Ontarians to support Ontario Parks, and I know that there's been some new initiatives on that. So could you expand a little

bit about how the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is undertaking to provide a more world-class experience at Ontario Parks?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Thank you, MPP Smith. That's a great question. I think it reflects an ability to capture the desire and demand we saw from Ontarians for Ontario Parks through the pandemic. We know it's there. It's one of the strongest brands in Ontario—dare I say, our nation, Ontario Parks. We had no online store. You'd go in; there were not those partnerships leveraging leaders in manufacturing in the community. I spoke with Anishinabek Nation about Ontario-made and Indigenous businesses and how we can better increase their presence. There's still more to come and we must do better in our Ontario Parks online store, but we didn't even have one, so now we have an online store that Ontarians can go to. Profits go back into provincial parks.

The collaborations we announced today with Collective Arts—that's going to support planting trees. Again, there's that philosophy of, "Let government plant the trees," but they never get done. Or you find those partnerships and you work collaboratively, bringing a lot of people together. Look at what we're doing with the emerald ash borer in Balsam Lake. The artist from Toronto—her work is now featured on the label of the lager that we're supporting for this park and this initiative.

I think to other innovative partnerships that we've been able to forge and the value that that can offer an aspiring artist and a craft brewery in Hamilton. The Peace Collective partnership that we rolled out just prior to Christmas—I know it was a big hit for me in the stockings and under the Christmas tree from my family. But what excites me is that it's sort of a user-fee principle, that those who really enjoy and want to go out and get those retro hats, the hoodies, the sweaters—if you go online, you'll really see something for everyone. And those proceeds go back to Ontario Parks. As I mentioned at the outset, \$130 million in revenue is going through Ontario Parks as a whole, and a good added revenue stream now through the online store. So I'm very excited, MPP Smith, about that.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Thank you. I'm going to defer my next question and pass it over to—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Dixon, go ahead.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Minister, I've had the opportunity to go speak to a lot of different students—civics classes, different grades, that type of thing. Usually they know that they could ask me cool questions about being a prosecutor or police or whatever, but instead, the question that I get most often is about climate change and about emissions, so it's evident that our young people have questions. You know they want to be advocates for the environment.

When we talk about greenhouse gas emissions, I understand that Ontario's target by 2030 is to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions by 30% below the 2005 levels. I gather we're on track, but what would be helpful to me, given the number of times I get this question, is if you can tell us a little bit more about the specific actions that we're taking to address greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Thank you very much for that question. It's a real whole-of-government approach to what we're doing, working, as I said, with industry on industrial decarbonization at Algoma and Dofasco; the largest investment in public transit in Canadian history with the Ontario Line; the return of the Northlander; expanding on-demand transit into communities like mine; clean transportation fuel standards. Again, I think what people fail to often realize in public policy is that it's a transition. It's not drive out jobs tomorrow and leave people impoverished. This Premier recognizes that you've got to work with industry to achieve those objectives.

1730

We talked a lot about it; for example, air emissions in Sarnia. This government got those SO<sub>2</sub> regulations done. We talked a lot about industrial decarbonization; we got it done. If we reflect back on who first made that commitment, I spoke with Elizabeth Witmer the other day and her leadership role—Premier Harris, Premier Eves. And we hear a lot about ambition and platitudes, which is very important, but let's not forget that the original timeline to reduce coal from electricity production that Premier Eves first committed to, the subsequent McGuinty-Wynne government ultimately achieved within those same predicted timelines. So this shouldn't be a political issue. We're working across successive governments. It's now Premier Ford who is leading the charge on industrial decarbonization, as I said, working with industry.

We also recognize the important role that expanding habitat plays in fighting climate change—nature-based solutions, improving biodiversity. The Greenlands Conservation Partnership program—because I think it's important to speak to some of the work that we're doing, I want to make sure you hear it in other words and not just mine:

“With the Greenlands Conservation Partnership, the Nature Conservancy of Canada is pleased to work with the government of Ontario as well as our partners and donors to ensure that Ontario's special places are protected and conserved for future generations.... Through this partnership, we are helping to ensure the province's natural areas remain a home for wildlife, a haven for recreation and a vital resource that cleans the air we breathe and the water we drink.” That's Mike Hendren from the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

I quote: “The Ontario Land Trust Alliance is very grateful for the leadership shown by the government of Ontario in supporting community land conservation.”

These aren't my words. These are the words of partners of this government in protecting, and it's really important that we do it. Again, you look at caribou and what we're doing to protect the north and caribou ranges.

I know I'm deviating slightly from pure GHG reductions there, but we're working with industry. You look at the news release: Unifor, United Steelworkers, FONOM, Northern Ontario Municipal Association, Anishinabek Nation—all of the partners we brought together who said that the Ontario plan is working. You contrast that with the federal minister, who won't even

come to the table and meet with these players, who rejected our request in the north, on the margins of NOMA, where we sat down and looked at Indigenous leaders in the forestry sector, who are employing the fastest-growing youth population, Indigenous youth. They weren't even at the table for that. But this government is. We're at the table, we're sitting down with them and we've got a plan: a plan to protect biodiversity, a plan to invest in public transit, a plan for industrial decarbonization, a plan to protect caribou, a plan to increase protections for species at risk.

That's our plan. And don't confuse what others want to see, which is phasing out nuclear and doing what we see in California and Germany and others, where they're revving up coal. That's what the NDP and Liberals, sadly, now offer Ontarians. I'm glad we got the assurance of support for nuclear from MPP Schreiner. I hope he'll support and actually vote in favour of SMRs and nuclear expansion—

*Interjections.*

**Hon. David Piccini:** No, but he's a good member.

I think that that is the plan. That's the plan to ensure clean, green growth and green jobs for future generations.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Just briefly, in your last minute, I think one of the most interesting things about what we're doing, given the building and the industrial projects, is the reliance on clean steel. If you can talk a little bit about Ontario's involvement in relying on green steel production and doing it in a clean way.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Absolutely. It's supporting these massive investments we're seeing in the automotive sector, and it's ensuring workers—my grandfather in the steel sector who came here. Many of those workers, with climate change and decarbonization, did they see a future? I'm not sure they did, maybe, years ago, but today they do. Manufacturers know, “Hey, we're part of clean, green growth in Ontario. We're part of a greener future. We've got a government that's working with us to see that.” I think that's inspiring for union members—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. The time is up.

This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Standing order 69 requires that the Chair “put without further amendment or debate every question necessary to dispose of the estimates.” Are the members ready to vote? We're ready.

Shall vote 1101, ministry administration program, carry? All in favour? All opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 1112, environmental policy, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All opposed? Motion carried.

Shall vote 1114, environmental sciences and standards, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All in opposition? The vote carries.



Shall vote 1116, environmental compliance and operations, carry? All in favour? All opposed? The motion carries.

Shall vote 1118, environmental assessment and permissions, carry? All in favour? All in opposition? Vote carried.

Shall vote 1119, climate change and resiliency, carry? All in favour? All in opposition? Vote carried.

Shall vote 1120, land and water, carry? All in favour? Opposition? Vote carried.

Shall vote 1121, Emissions Performance Standards Program, carry? All in favour? All those opposed? The vote carries.

Shall the 2023-24 estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks carry? All in favour? All opposed? The vote carries.

Shall the Chair report the 2023-24 estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to the House? All in favour, please raise your hand. All opposed? The vote carries. Thank you.

That concludes the estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Seeing as there is no other committee business, the committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on Monday, June 5, 2023. Thank you very much.

*The committee adjourned at 1739.*





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