

JULIE GREEN—MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
Agriculture Strategy
Committee of the Whole—2018-2019 Operating Budget Review
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MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I understand this is the department in which I can ask the question about the money allocated to the agriculture strategy implementation. What role is the department playing in the implementation of the strategy with the \$150,000 allocated? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: The department, of course, and we have responsibility for the lands, we're looking at our approach for land tenures and the availability of land for agricultural purposes. The problem, which is somewhat related to some of the matters I spoke of earlier, is that land availability in the unsettled land claim areas is constrained, if I can put it that way, by existing land withdrawals. So we do want to go ahead. This is in the interest of the government as a whole, mainly driven by the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment and their agricultural strategy. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the Minister's answer, but it doesn't really answer the question. So how does this money help the unsettled land claims? I'm missing something. Could the Minister please clarify? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: This money isn't to settle the land claims, but perhaps Mr. Hagen would elaborate a little more on how the money is being spent. I understand it's to develop policies and procedures for evaluating agricultural land lease applications, but he may have something to add.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Mr. Hagen.

MR. HAGEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. So, like the Minister mentioned, the Department of ITI has developed an agricultural strategy for the Northwest Territories, and the aim of the strategy is to provide guidance and direction as to its resources and policies. We come in as Lands and do an examination of the land tenure and land availability for agricultural purposes. There's a wide range of possibilities rather than the traditional focus of leasing of arable land; recent advances in agricultural techniques; there's permaculture and greenhouse culture, which doesn't take a lot of land availability, and that's what we don't have. In the unsettled land claim regions where the best lands are available for agriculture, particularly Hay River, Fort Smith, Fort Resolution, all the lands are mostly withdrawn for land claim negotiations, and until those are settled there is very little land available for any large-scale agricultural farming. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. Hagen. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, as I understand it, the idea is to look at alternatives to, sort of, open field agriculture in order to maximize the land that is available for agricultural purposes. Is that correct? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Sebert.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Perhaps Mr. Hagen can answer that.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Sebert. Mr. Hagen.

MR. HAGEN: Mr. Chair, yes, that's correct. ITI and our subs, we looked at the recent advances in agricultural techniques, as I mentioned, permaculture, greenhouse culture; and these present opportunities for sustainable agriculture production conducted in areas not previously considered feasible. Those areas were mostly outside the prime agricultural lands that are withdrawn for land claims. Thank you, Mr. Chair.