



4th Session, 37th Parliament

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CROWN CORPORATIONS

Victoria

Tuesday, April 8, 2003

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KEN STEWART, MLA, CHAIR

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**SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CROWN CORPORATIONS**

Victoria
Tuesday, April 8, 2003

Chair:

* Ken Stewart (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows L)

Deputy Chair:

* Harry Bloy (Burquitlam L)

Members:

* Pat Bell (Prince George North L)

* Susan Brice (Saanich South L)

* Daniel Jarvis (North Vancouver-Seymour L)

* John Les (Chilliwack-Sumas L)

Harold Long (Powell River-Sunshine Coast L)

Barry Penner (Chilliwack-Kent L)

Hon. John van Dongen (Abbotsford-Clayburn L)

* Rod Visser (North Island L)

John Wilson (Cariboo North L)

* Patrick Wong (Vancouver-Kensington L)

Joy MacPhail (Vancouver-Hastings NDP)

** denotes member present*

Clerk:

Craig James

Committee Staff:

Audrey Chan (Committee Research Analyst)

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MINUTES

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON CROWN CORPORATIONS



Tuesday, April 8, 2003
9:30 a.m. - 9:45 a.m.
Douglas Fir Committee Room
Parliament Buildings, Victoria

Present: Ken Stewart, MLA (Convener); Pat Bell, MLA; Harry Bloy, MLA; Susan Brice, MLA; Daniel Jarvis, MLA; John Les, MLA; Rod Visser, MLA; Patrick Wong, MLA

Unavoidably Absent: Harold Long, MLA; Joy MacPhail, MLA; Barry Penner, MLA; Hon. John van Dongen, MLA; Dr. John Wilson, MLA

1. **Resolved**, that Mr. Ken Stewart, MLA be elected Chair of the Committee.
2. **Resolved**, that Mr. Harry Bloy, MLA be elected Deputy Chair of the Committee.
3. The Committee agreed that scheduling of meetings be consistent with other meetings in Victoria.
4. The Committee adjourned at 9:51 a.m. to the Call of the Chair.

Ken Stewart, MLA
Chair

Craig James
Clerk Assistant and
Clerk of Committees

TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2003

The committee met at 9:36 a.m.

Election of Chair and Deputy Chair

C. James: I'll call the meeting to order. This being the first meeting of the Select Standing Committee on Crown Corporations for the current session and there not being a chairperson, I call for nominations for Chair.

D. Jarvis: I nominate Mr. Stewart.

C. James: Any further nominations? Any further nominations? Any further nominations? There being no further nominations, I presume you accept the nomination. In that case, I'll put the question on the motion.

Motion approved.

[K. Stewart in the chair.]

K. Stewart (Chair): The next item is that we also need a Deputy Chair. I open the floor for nominations for Deputy Chair.

P. Bell: I nominate the member for Burquitlam.

K. Stewart (Chair): That would be Harry Bloy. Would you accept?

H. Bloy: Yes, I do.

K. Stewart (Chair): Okay. Do we have a seconder?

A Voice: So moved.

K. Stewart (Chair): Any further nominations? Any further nominations? Any further nominations? Seeing none, we declare Harry Bloy as the Deputy Chair. Congratulations.

H. Bloy (Deputy Chair): Thank you.

Other Business

K. Stewart (Chair): For our next order of business, is there any business anyone wants to put forward for the agenda for this morning?

There are a couple items I think we should talk about. I'd like to maybe reflect a little bit about our previous experience with this committee. In the past we were trying to get through the Crown corporations, but the core review held us up a bit last time. This time we don't have that issue.

We have four weeks of session left after this week in the spring sitting. Our intention was to meet on Wednesdays. This was a carryover from our last committee, to meet on Wednesdays when cabinet was in

session and most of us were here. The other thing we tried in the past was to tie it into when we had caucus meetings so that we weren't bringing people down strictly for one meeting, trying to be economical about it. That's another consideration.

Are there any thoughts from the floor with regard to scheduling meetings or those two comments about trying to do it Wednesdays when we have a free morning while we're here and tying it in with the caucus meeting or other draw to Victoria so that we can keep expenses down?

S. Brice: That makes good sense. Those times also get noticed by other committees, as well, and get kind of grabbed up. But to the extent we can do that, I think it makes good sense.

K. Stewart (Chair): In replying to Susan, I'm going to throw this out. What we did before was use first names here. Does anyone have any difficulty with that? That's been our practice in the past.

Some Voices: No.

[0940]

K. Stewart (Chair): No difficulty with that? Okay.

That's pretty much it, other than any suggestions from the floor with regard to the priority of the Crown corporations. We'll be getting our terms of reference for our next meeting.

Our role here is to look at the Crown corporations. What we do is look at their business plans and their financial plans, and we benchmark where they're at. Then we look at their progress over the year to see if they're fulfilling the expectations of the Legislature and the public.

Our role here is to be an oversight committee of the Crown corporations, to make them accountable to the public. This is something that hasn't happened for a number of years.

We managed to get through six last time. I would encourage the new members to go to the website and have a look at what it is we are doing with them. It will give you a little bit of background into it.

I'm just going to turn it over to the Clerk for some comments.

C. James: For your information, yesterday the Government House Leader tabled in the House a notice of motion respecting this and a couple of other committees. I understand that tomorrow the motion respecting all of them will be moved. I understand, as well, that John van Dongen, who's currently on the committee but a minister, will be removed from the committee, as follows past practice.

We have Audrey Chan, who has been the researcher for the committee and written reports and done all the other work for us, with us this morning as well. I refer members to a copy of the committee's report tabled in the House last autumn that contains a number of issues the committee was addressing. I

draw your attention in particular to the appendices to refresh your memory as to the different criteria the committee was hoping to place on its view of Crown corporations generally.

K. Stewart (Chair): Actually, before I turn it over to Audrey, I'd like her to just make a few comments on how, administratively, she goes about getting the information to us, mostly electronically.

The other thing I'd like to point out to the committee, if you're not already aware of it, is that if you look to the wall, you will see a red "on air" and a "record" light. All our proceedings are done by Hansard. Within a day or so after the conclusion of the meeting, you'll be able to read about it in *Hansard*, as will everyone else in British Columbia who so chooses. I just want to bring that to your attention.

Audrey, if you could just tell us a little bit about what you do administratively.

A. Chan: Sure. Good morning, members. Generally, what happens is that once the committee has decided which Crown corporations they would like to appear before the committee, about two weeks before the date of their appearance our office will send out an e-mail with attachments of the latest versions of their service plans and annual reports for you to review and also any other documents the Crown corporations have forwarded to us that they would like you to review.

Sometimes they might also attach their presentation documents so that you can get a heads-up. Also attached to that e-mail will be the criteria the Clerk was referring to, which is Appendix 1 in the reports. That's the form the committee has used in the past for their assessment. That's generally what we send out two weeks before the meeting date.

K. Stewart (Chair): With regard to the recording, we usually get quite a bit of the information electronically before the meeting. It would be helpful if you had an opportunity to go over the business plan and the financial plan of the corporation before they present. Most of them have been PowerPoint presentations. They come and do a PowerPoint presentation, going over their business plan. We ask them questions, and then we fill out the report.

The sooner after the meeting that you fill out the report, the fresher it is in your mind, and there's always an opportunity, if there's a question that you felt was unanswered, for us to ask them to get that response to us. That gets sent out to all the members of the committee through Audrey, so any liaison we ask for from the Crown will come back to everyone through e-mail. We try to keep track of it that way. It reduces the cost of printing everything. Also, a lot of the major reports from the Crown corporations are on line or electronically available, and we'll try and do it that way.

[0945]

The final thing we should look at today is a list of preferred initial Crowns to come in. If you have some thoughts, I'd like to hear from you on those. The one

we have been waiting for, which is ready to go, by my understanding, is ICBC. That would be one I would suggest we put on there. If anyone else has any preferred Crowns or some that you'd like to see sooner than later...

This process will continue into July. Last year the practice was we shut down at the end of July through August and then started up in September again. If that's the will of the committee, we can look at doing the same. We'll have another meeting at the end of the next session where we can go over our schedule in more detail for the coming year. It'll give some of the new members an opportunity to look over the information from the past.

H. Bloy: On the Crown corps, do B.C. Ferries and B.C. Transit, now TransLink, no longer report here?

K. Stewart (Chair): I'm pretty sure that B.C. Ferries is going to be off. They are a new company now; they are not a Crown corporation. We still get B.C. Transit, but not GVTA. We had B.C. Transit, and the biggest server they have is the greater Victoria area. We did see them last year, so you might want to refer to the report with regard to that.

S. Brice: I was just wondering, Ken, in this document you gave us, about some of the committee recommendations from October '02. How are those tracked? Is that what you were referring to where we would be given an update, or is there some formalized effort made to find out whether or not these recommendations were considered?

K. Stewart (Chair): It would be my expectation that when we see a Crown for the second time, we send them copies of their last evaluation, and we can pose those questions ahead of time to them. What we've been doing in the past is that as we saw one Crown, we would know who we were seeing next. We'd have the questions to prepare them, if there was anything specific we wanted to ask them, ahead of time, to make sure they included that. Again, there's the opportunity for questions on the day after they present and then further questions if we want clarifications. Really, it is as much information as we want from them, we can get.

J. Les: Just a question about the scope of our work. Would it be open to us to pursue the — I'll put it very bluntly here — elimination of a Crown?

K. Stewart (Chair): Our role here is not to define whether a Crown exists or doesn't exist. Our role here is to look at the business plan and the financial plan and to state whether we feel they are meeting the objectives that have been set in the past. I wouldn't suggest if we had some strong recommendations that we couldn't make them. But to be clear about what our role is, it is to ensure that the Crown corporation is doing what says it is doing and that the government's

and public's expectations of those Crown corporations are being met. That's the role of this committee, to hold them accountable for that.

J. Les: I guess another way of putting that would be if this committee decided whatever service being provided by a particular Crown could be better and more efficiently delivered by some other mechanism, would this committee be open to make those kinds of recommendations?

K. Stewart (Chair): I think the one point we can make is: are they providing a service we think is redundant.

J. Les: I'm not even thinking necessarily of redundancy. I'm thinking of alternate service delivery mechanisms that could replace the activities as currently in place through a Crown corporation.

K. Stewart (Chair): Again, we can look at this as we develop this committee into this second reidentification of what it is that we are doing. We were pretty open as to what recommendations we could make, and the appropriate avenue for it may not necessarily be back to the Crown but back to the minister. The ministers are invited to be here too, if they wish, or some of their staff.

[0950]

J. Les: The reason I ask the question is that I prefer not

to be guided by or boxed in by seeing how the status quo is doing and whether the status quo is most efficient. My guidance comes from how the taxpayer is best served. If we can keep that in mind as our guiding principle, I think that would be preferable.

K. Stewart (Chair): At this point I don't want to limit what we're doing, but I think we have to be careful about what our role is. I believe the time for discussion on this is when we get our terms of reference, which we'll have by the next meeting, and that will give us some guidance.

Certainly, in the past we've been more open than closed with regard to suggestions from members. That's just past experience. Where we're going to go with the terms of reference.... I think we have to see where they are. We may need to get some reclarification of that, if we have that. In the past what we've really tried to do is to make the Crown corporations accountable to somebody other than just the minister.

Any further questions?

We'll look for a date; I would suspect the Wednesday after we return from our two-week break. We'll try to have something scheduled for that time.

Again, we've got a list of Crowns that were held over from before. We'll try to go after some of those first. Certainly, as we move along, we're open to being adaptable to who we want to see next.

Any further input or discussion from committee members?

The committee adjourned at 9:51 a.m.