



5th Session, 37th Parliament

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CROWN CORPORATIONS

Victoria

Wednesday, April 28, 2004

Issue No. 26

KEN STEWART, MLA, CHAIR

ISSN 1499-4186

Published under the authority of the Speaker

Hansard Services publishes transcripts both in print and on the Internet.
Chamber debates are broadcast on television and webcast on the Internet.

www.leg.bc.ca/cmt

**SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CROWN CORPORATIONS**

Victoria
Wednesday, April 28, 2004

Chair:

* Ken Stewart (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows L)

Deputy Chair:

* Harry Bloy (Burquitlam L)

Members:

* Daniel Jarvis (North Vancouver-Seymour L)
Harold Long (Powell River-Sunshine Coast L)
* Dennis MacKay (Bulkley Valley-Stikine L)
* Karn Manhas (Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain L)
Ted Nebbeling (West Vancouver-Garibaldi L)
Barry Penner (Chilliwack-Kent L)
* Rod Visser (North Island L)
* John Wilson (Cariboo North L)
* Patrick Wong (Vancouver-Kensington L)
Joy MacPhail (Vancouver-Hastings NDP)
Paul Nettleton (Prince George-Omineca Ind L)

** denotes member present*

Clerk:

Craig James

Committee Staff:

Jonathan Fershau (Committee Researcher)

CONTENTS

Select Standing Committee on Crown Corporations

Wednesday, April 28, 2004

Page

Committee Meeting Schedule and Review of Crown Corporations..... 345

MINUTES

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON CROWN CORPORATIONS



Wednesday, April 28, 2004
12 noon
Douglas Fir Committee Room
Parliament Buildings, Victoria

Present: Ken Stewart, MLA, (Chair); Harry Bloy, MLA (Deputy Chair); Daniel Jarvis, MLA; Dennis MacKay, MLA; Karn Manhas, MLA; Rod Visser, MLA; Dr. John Wilson, MLA; Patrick Wong, MLA

Unavoidably Absent: Harold Long, MLA; Joy MacPhail, MLA; Ted Nebbeling, MLA; Paul Nettleton, MLA; Barry Penner, MLA

1. The Committee considered a schedule of meetings including dates, locations and a list of Crown Corporations to review during the current session.
2. The Committee agreed that the Chair and Deputy Chair could prepare a schedule of meetings having been supplied with Members' preferences as to the Crown Corporation to be reviewed in order to facilitate the work of the Committee.
3. The Committee adjourned at 12:34 p.m. to the call of the Chair.

Ken Stewart, MLA
Chair

Craig James
Clerk Assistant and
Clerk of Committees

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 28, 2004

The committee met at 12:07 p.m.

[K. Stewart in the chair.]

K. Stewart (Chair): I'd like to call the committee to order. The first item is to look at our agenda and see if we have any additions to our agenda. Does anyone have any additions to the agenda? We can start, then.

Committee Meeting Schedule and Review of Crown Corporations

K. Stewart (Chair): The first item is the scheduling of meetings and the list of Crown agencies to be examined this session. I would suggest that we start first with a schedule. In a meeting that I had with the Clerk prior to this meeting, we talked about the time we had left during this session, the availability of people over the summer months during the break and the time we have in the fall.

Generally speaking, this committee now can run up until the date that we prorogue the next session, so we're good until February — the second week, roughly. We have the months of May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December and January. One of the traditions that appears to be happening with regards to breaks from official duties is the month of August and at least the first two weeks in January. Is there any consensus that we would like to block out those bits of time from any meetings? We're talking about no meetings in the month of August and for at least the first two to three weeks in January. Is there a consensus on that?

Some Voices: Yes.

K. Stewart (Chair): Anyone that has difficulty with that? Fine. So we're looking at August and the first three weeks of January being out.

[1210]

Past experience has shown that we would like to have.... Historically, we've had a couple of meetings prior to the start of the session to set up our final reports of any of the Crowns we've seen to that time. We'd be looking to schedule some meetings in early February. I'm going to now open the floor to any specific days that work better. Not having any events scheduled as to when we will be in Victoria at that time, we're pretty much.... It's an open book. Any particular days that work better for people during the week? Would you rather have it early in the week, later in the week, mid-week?

J. Wilson: Our caucus meetings are usually — what? — Tuesday? So if it's a day before or a day after, it would fit into some of our schedules an awful lot better, like myself, probably Dennis and anyone else that has to travel a long distance.

K. Stewart (Chair): Can I suggest as a premise that we try and work any scheduling in Victoria around the

caucus meeting we're having in Victoria, or if we have a caucus meeting in any other part of the province — i.e., Vancouver — that we try and work our scheduling dates around that? That's sort of a principle we'll try and work with — okay?

D. Jarvis: Except for Rod Visser.

K. Stewart (Chair): So far with our scheduling we've decided that we're not going to meet in August, we're not going to meet in the first three weeks of January, and we're going to schedule them around caucus meetings.

D. Jarvis: I was thinking. Except for Rod Visser, is it easier for the people up in the north and in the Kootenays and everything to travel to Vancouver direct or to come to Victoria?

K. Stewart (Chair): My suggestion would be if we have to come over to Victoria for a reason, we schedule it here. If not, we would consider Vancouver.

D. Jarvis: Okay.

K. Stewart (Chair): Is that consensus? Okay, I see lots of head nodding. Now we're getting a couple of principles of our scheduling down.

D. MacKay: I just want to ask about the January scheduling. I don't know how.... I have plans to be away for the whole month, so it's going to be a conflict, I'm sure. Okay, I just wanted to make sure there is not a problem.

A Voice: Another holiday.

D. MacKay: That's right. Another holiday.

A Voice: Where are you going?

D. MacKay: South Africa.

K. Stewart (Chair): I think that one of the things you're going to find when we do scheduling is that there's always going to be someone who can't make it. If we say that we're looking to the first three weeks of January being out, I'm sure we can accommodate most people, because most people would have finished their holidays by then. Not all of us have the luxury of being able to take a month of holidays.

So we've got a few principles here. All right.

Moving on. Again, I'm reflecting on the conversation that I had with the Clerk earlier. Looking at the schedule, we thought we would try and schedule at least one meeting in May — because we need a couple of weeks to get someone to come before us as witnesses — two in June, at least one in July. Then the month of August is out. Then in September.... Again, I would make a suggestion that we look in the second half of September for two meetings, again trying to block to-

wards a month that we're off — the second half of September as the first half. Do we have a consensus on that?

A Voice: Yes, the later the better.

K. Stewart (Chair): Okay, so we've got a consensus that we'll try and schedule those two meetings then. In October we're sitting. One of the indications I've got from Randy is that he's going to try and schedule his meetings on a day other than Wednesday, so my hope is that in the fall session we will be able to schedule our meetings on the Wednesday, as we have in the past. Any thoughts on that? Did it work out well for us before, for those of you that were on the committee — on Wednesdays?

D. MacKay: That's Wednesday mornings.

K. Stewart (Chair): Wednesday mornings — yes.

K. Manhas: Can we think about doing it during the time while we're sitting — not just Wednesday, but let's say Tuesday morning — and then we just organize ourselves so that we can make it at that time?

K. Stewart (Chair): One of the things we found before, Karn, is that Wednesday mornings — and I'll look to some of the members who were on the committee before — worked out really well because cabinet was meeting and there was no House duty. What has caused a bit of conflict are our current Wednesday meetings that we're having now. My understanding is that those are going to be pushed to Tuesday, so we'll have the Wednesdays free. I'm just going by past experience that Wednesdays seemed to work out well.

[1215]

J. Wilson: I don't know if other people have the same problem, but Wednesday morning is the only time that some of us have any chance to go and do things around our personal affairs here without getting leave. We're not sitting on Wednesday morning, so if you have to do some banking or anything like that, that's the only opportunity you get. I would say that if we block out every Wednesday, it does take its toll. I have to agree: there are other mornings that there's no reason we can't have a meeting, even if the House is sitting — at that same time.

K. Stewart (Chair): One of the considerations, also, is that we do have members of the opposition on the committee. Wednesday morning was a day they weren't in session, and that was one consideration.

The other comment I will have with that is that we very seldom met every Wednesday. It was every second one, so you'd have every second Wednesday off, at least from this committee's responsibilities. That was another consideration.

J. Wilson: Every second Wednesday is fine.

K. Stewart (Chair): Okay, good. Shall we try and look at every second Wednesday while we're sitting? That's another sort of principle we'll put down for scheduling.

Basically, as I reflect back on what we've done so far, I believe we've pretty much laid out — not individual dates, because we're waiting for specific times of other events to come up — the framework for a schedule. My suggestion would be that we take those principles and try to apply them back to a real schedule. I'd look to the Deputy Chair to maybe take on that task of scheduling, working with both the Clerk and myself.

H. Bloy (Deputy Chair): Sure.

K. Stewart (Chair): Could I have some thoughts on my last comment first?

J. Wilson: I had another suggestion.

D. MacKay: Because this is my first time on this committee, I'm not sure of the length of time it takes and how many actual Crown corps we're going to be looking at. How many do we have to do this session?

K. Stewart (Chair): We have no number that says we have to meet this many times. Traditionally — again, I'm just going to go back over our experience — we've set aside two and a half to three hours per meeting. An hour for when we have witnesses.

When we have witnesses, we've had shorter meetings of an hour — half an hour when we've only had to do reports. But when we have witnesses, generally what we've done is we've gone two and a half to three hours. The first hour is the presentation; the second hour is questions of the presenters. The last half-hour of the three hours is, first, a quick synopsis of what we've heard that day and then a review of earlier works. Generally, two and a half to three hours is what we've been looking at.

D. MacKay: Looking at the sheet that has been provided here, it shows.... I'm assuming that the date reviewed was the date they were last reviewed.

K. Stewart (Chair): Yes.

D. MacKay: The ones that don't have anything in there are ones we're going to be looking to for our presentations during this coming session.

K. Stewart (Chair): Again, that's another whole process we have to look at: who we want to see when. There's obviously a greater interest in the larger Crowns and their activities because of the impact they have on the province. There's a number of them that are relatively small. You'll also notice that there's a large number that are in transition of being wound down. Given the fact of the numbers of meetings we put out, it would allow us to see approximately ten Crowns by December. That's a pretty ambitious schedule, to see ten Crowns.

D. MacKay: There's no obligation to study them all, I guess, was the question. Okay. That was my question.

K. Stewart (Chair): This committee's been fairly autonomous as to who we see, what we see and how we report out.

J. Wilson: Just on your scheduling. From my perspective, the first half of June is much better than the last half.

K. Stewart (Chair): Okay. Is that a consensus from the group too — that the first half is better than the last half?

A Voice: Yes.

K. Stewart (Chair): We'll try to look at that. Again, one of the earlier principles is to try to schedule it with other activities that would cause us to be in either Victoria or Vancouver.

[1220]

I made a suggestion earlier about a committee being struck with the Deputy Chair, myself and the Clerk to take these principles and come up with a framework for scheduling. Is that generally accepted by the groups out there? I see by the nods — okay. We'll leave scheduling for now and move it to that phase.

The other item was the Crown agencies to examine.

D. Jarvis: I would like to enter into that part of the discussion, suggesting the B.C. liquor distribution branch, especially before Christmas — no, I'm kidding, trying to be funny, ha ha — and B.C. Transmission Corporation.

K. Stewart (Chair): Just for the benefit of those that are new to the committee, these are two that we wanted to see last time. But because they are relatively new and activities were going on there that may have had some outcomes that would affect where they were going.... I think they've now been stabilized, and they're probably appropriate to add to our list now.

I would like to suggest, again, a process of identifying what Crowns we'd like to do here as compared to just doing a schedule. My suggestion would be that everyone could do a list of their top five. Prioritize the top five Crowns that you would like to see. Again, refrain from using those that are being wound down. You might want to look at their service plans and go to their websites. Some, you might see, are relatively small, and some are really large. That might have some bias. My suggestion would be that each member of the committee prioritize their top five they'd like to see, and we'll send that back to the scheduling committee and take it from there.

D. Jarvis: Do you want this now?

K. Stewart (Chair): No, just e-mail it to us.

Prior to us doing any actual scheduling, at our next meeting we'll come back with a schedule of times, at least for the foreseeable future that we can schedule out into, and a group of the Crowns that you've indicated we'd most like to see — what your priorities as a committee are. Any further thoughts?

K. Manhas: I noticed that.... Are we limited to the Crowns that have not yet been reviewed?

K. Stewart (Chair): No. There was very strong indication from the committee last time that there are some Crowns they have reviewed that they would really like to see back relatively quickly. It's your priorities that you'd like to see. Then as a committee we'll try and mesh those together. You're not restricted by whether we've seen them or not.

K. Manhas: Okay. Thanks.

C. James: How about by Friday?

K. Stewart (Chair): The Clerk just suggested if you could get those to the committee by Friday. Just send them through the Clerk's office. That way, everything is handled.

Okay, so we've covered our first two topics.

K. Manhas: Everyone has their lists now. Do you mind if we just go through them now?

D. MacKay: Why don't we just turn them in to Craig?

K. Stewart (Chair): I think that in all fairness, we have to give all members some time to get those in.

We'll just have a short — say five minutes — recess, and then we can come back to finish up this meeting.

The committee recessed from 12:24 p.m. to 12:28 p.m.

[K. Stewart in the chair.]

K. Stewart (Chair): I'd like to call the committee back from recess.

I'd like to put out to the committee that there are two items I'd like to add to the agenda. One would be the reporting principles, and the other is how we've handled meetings in the past. Is everyone okay with adding those two items? Okay. Great.

Now I'll just look to the Clerk to talk about how we've handled the meetings in the past.

C. James: Typically, what will happen is that once the committee has agreed on its schedule of meetings and the Crown corporations it would like to have appear before it, we compile the lists and notify the Crown agencies secretariat and also the Crown corporations, who then supply, through us, material related to the committee's inquiry into them. By that, I mean the ser-

vice plans, the annual report and, to some extent, the minutes of various board meetings. I think the committee in the past has had an interest in examining the minutes of board meetings that have occurred in the past.

All of that material is circulated by e-mail, which has worked very well, I think, in the past for this particular committee. We try to reduce the amount of paper that is flowing back and forth, so we're e-mailing all this information hither and yon as well as receiving it from the particular Crown agency in question.

The Crown corporation senior officials will then appear before the committee. The committee then will engage the Crown corporation officials in a discussion or debate on their service plan and other matters relating to their operations. Typically, the floor will be given to the Crown corporation's officials to make a presentation of up to an hour, followed by up to an hour of questioning and dialogue between the members and the agency. That's followed by up to another hour of, ostensibly, a debate among the members as to what they heard and how they felt about the presentation.

Following all of that, there may be another series of meetings with various other Crown corporations, following which a draft report will be prepared for the members of the committee to consider. That report, once approved by the committee, will be presented to the Legislature by the Chair.

[1230]

K. Stewart (Chair): Any questions? Okay.

The next item I wanted to talk about was reporting principles. Historically, our reporting principles are our own reporting principles. In British Columbia we are sort of a leader across the country in reporting out and in how we structure our transparency in government in doing our reports. Our reports are very similar to the standard used by all other agencies of the Crown in British Columbia. There's some desire for us to move a little closer with ours so that they're broadbanded, so that we're using a very similar format. On Sunday, Monday and Tuesday I'm attending a workshop in Ottawa strictly on that aspect of reporting out and how to make our reports as effective as possible.

What I would like to suggest is that prior to our next meeting we look.... Actually, for our next meeting we'll use our reporting-out principles, but when we actually reflect upon the group and start drafting our report, we might want to look at enhancing our reporting out with some of these new aspects of it, or some of the aspects that are here that we haven't integrated into our report.

It's been my belief as Chair since starting that our reports are in transition. We're constantly trying to improve our reporting out, and I think this would be a natural step in doing that. In doing so, I would ask the new members if they could spend some time prior to our first meeting of a Crown looking over some of the reports of the past so that they get a feel of the types of things that we have been looking at in the past. Then we can build upon that. We're always looking, striving

to be better informants for the citizens out there by way of our reports and the transparency of such.

J. Wilson: Well, if I understood what you said rightly — that we were a leader in the way we report things....

K. Stewart (Chair): Yes, British Columbia is, and our committee is probably right up there with the best of them.

J. Wilson: Well, then, to go backwards and incorporate the other processes into ours without reviewing them or looking at them doesn't make a lot of sense.

K. Stewart (Chair): What I'm talking about is bringing ours in line with the format that's used in other agencies in B.C. — that is considered to be one of the provincial leaders.

J. Wilson: Not in comparison to other provinces. Okay.

K. Stewart (Chair): No, we're leading. There's no doubt about that. We'll continue to lead.

The last point, again with regards to meetings, is we're looking at the potential of — and I'm looking for approval — a May 17 meeting. That would be our May meeting. That's our last week of session. We're looking at it being on a Tuesday morning starting at 8 o'clock so that we can conclude and give those people that have to go into the House an opportunity. We may run a half-hour past 10 o'clock just to get our feedback from the committee. Depending on who we can choose and get at that time — and the subcommittee will come up with that, based on your input as to your top five and the availability — we're looking at a meeting from approximately 8 o'clock in the morning till 10:30 in the morning.

D. Jarvis: That's the 18th?

K. Stewart (Chair): Sorry. It is Tuesday, May 18. I'm just looking at my schedule now. The committee recommended a meeting in the week of the 17th, and it happens to be May 18, Tuesday.

All those in favour?

Some Voices: Aye.

K. Stewart (Chair): Okay. That pretty much concludes our business, unless anyone else has something.

D. Jarvis: You're going to give us lots of notice as to who we're going to have here?

K. Stewart (Chair): Hopefully, we will have that for you by Friday — if not, Monday at the latest.

Motion to adjourn?

The committee adjourned at 12:34 p.m.