

FOCUS ON THE LAND: Preparing for the Royal Commission

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On October 20, 1988, the Executive Council appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into all matters relating to land ownership, land use and the quality of the Island landscape. The Royal Commission on the Land will hold fifteen public hearings across the province, beginning on April 3, to receive the views of Island organizations and individuals. A summary of information about the Royal Commission is contained on page 5.

Background Information

In 1972 the Royal Commission on Land Ownership and Land Use carried out a round of public hearings. It released its report in 1973. Most of the information presented here attempts to show changes that have taken place since that time.

Population Change

Between 1971 and 1986, the population of the Island grew from 111,641 to 126,646, an average increase of 1000 persons per year. From a low point of 88,000 in 1931, population numbers have grown slowly but steadily over the last half century.

Population Distribution: Urban, Rural Non Farm, Farm

Most population growth between 1971 and 1986 occurred in urban centres and surrounding rural land. Farm population declined by more than half during this period. Less than 8 of the total population now lives on farms.

Changes in Agriculture

Between 1971 and 1986, both the number of farms and the amount of land in agriculture declined, continuing a trend that has proceeded unchecked since the early part of this century. Less than half the total area of the province is now occupied by farms. Despite overall acreage decreases, total farm production has not declined. As farm numbers decline, the average size the remaining farms increases.

Cropland

Despite declines in farm numbers and overall farmland acreages, land in crop production increased by 35,000 acres between 1971 and 1986. Row crops (potatoes and tobacco) accounted for much of the increase. As total farmland acreages decline, the land within crop rotation is being farmed more intensively.

Changes in Labour Force, 1971-1986

The labour force has grown dramatically with the entry of more women into the workplace. The relative position of the primary land based occupations (farming, fishing) declines with the rapid expansion of the service or tertiary sector.

Tourism Growth

Between 1975 and 1987, annual expenditures by tourists increased from \$26 million to 82 million. The significance of the tourist industry to the Island's economy continues to increase. Rural and seashore vistas are an important element of the tourist experience.

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Land Use Planning

In 1973, no city, town or village had developed a plan for its future. By 1988, 28 towns and communities had adopted Official Plans with zoning bylaws, to plan and regulate land use within their boundaries. In rural areas that are not within municipalities, or in communities with no Official Plans, land use is regulated by the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs using the Planning Act Regulations.

Location of New Single Family Dwellings 1977-1988

More than half of all new single-family dwellings continue to be built in unserviced areas, using individual wells and septic tanks.

Growth in Summer Cottage Lots, 1973-1987

From 1973 to 1987 3500 more cottage lots were created than building permits issued. There is an abundant supply of approved cottage lots within the province.

Non-Resident Land Ownership Changes

Between 1973 and 1988 an average of 3400 acres were converted annually from resident to non-resident ownership. Acreage owned by non-residents increased from 7 to 11 of the total area of the Island.

Non-Resident Ownership by Parcel Size

The average size of a land parcel owned by a non-resident is 14 acres.

Although only 23 of all parcels are more than 10 acres in size, they make up 93 of the total acreage owned by non-residents.

Non-Resident Applications

A non-resident must apply to, and receive permission from, Executive Council to own more than 5 acres or 165 feet of shore frontage in the province. The number of non-resident applications has remained relatively constant since 1974.

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Highway Restrictions

Planning Act Regulations are designed to preserve an unhindered flow of traffic along major highways and to provide safe access to other roads. Along arterial highways no driveways to individual house lots are permitted. On other roads, sight distance standards must be met for any new driveway.

Natural Areas

More than 32 sites across the Island have been proposed as natural areas by environmental groups. Natural areas are those that have remained relatively untouched by human activity. At present, most of the 32 have no defined legal status.

LEGISLATION ON LAND

The Royal Commission will be reviewing the effectiveness of the many laws and regulations that affect land in this province. Among the legislation to be considered will be:

Planning Act - sets out the ground rules for land use planning. Contains authority for the province to regulate land under the Planning Act Regulations and for municipalities to establish Official Plans and zoning bylaws.

Lands Protection Act - regulates the conditions for the purchase of land by non-residents and corporations. Limits the maximum land holdings of non-residents, residents and corporations.

Other legislation influencing land use and landscape quality includes:

- Archaeological Sites Protection Act
- Automobile Junkyards Act
- Environmental Protection Act
- Highway Advertisements Act
- Natural Areas Protection Act
- Real Property Act
- Real Property Assessment Act
- Real Property Tax Act
- Recreation Development Act
- Unsightly Property Act

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