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Auditor General of Nova Scotia

AUDITOR GENERAL--June 2015 Report Released

In his June 2015 Report, released today, June 17, Auditor General Michael Pickup said that aquaculture monitoring needs improvement. He also said that the Department of Health and Wellness does not know if prevention and treatment work is reducing gambling-related harms.

He found that while government procurement generally followed legislation and policy, work is needed to make sure items are properly approved. As well, he found that six departments and agencies have made significant progress in implementing his office's previous recommendations.

Mr. Pickup identified concerns with aquaculture monitoring. He noted the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture has limited ability to make operators follow environmental monitoring requirements.

"The department can cancel licences but needs other options for minor offences," said Mr. Pickup. "Additionally, information systems do not support effective management of aquaculture in Nova Scotia because the systems do not contain complete information."

The auditor general found that the department followed its policies in issuing aquaculture licences, leases and renewals but needs more written documentation to guide staff. While the department is providing fish health monitoring services and responding to emergencies, it may not always be aware of disease outbreaks or if these are properly managed.

The relocation of most of the Aquaculture Division and resulting loss of staff likely contributed to a backlog and delay in processing aquaculture renewal applications. The department also stopped processing new applications while it waited for significant regulatory changes.

An audit of the prevention and treatment of problem gambling found the Department of Health and Wellness does not know if prevention and treatment work is reducing the number of Nova Scotians experiencing gambling-related harms.

"Many Nova Scotians who need help with problems related to their gambling do not reach out to provincial services. Health and Wellness

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needs to figure out why this is and focus on getting more of those people to look for help."

The audit also looked at responsible gambling. It found that while the Nova Scotia Provincial Lotteries and Casino Corporation has a number of programs to promote responsible gambling, improvements are needed in evaluating those programs to make sure they reach enough people.

Additionally, agreements between the province and First Nations bands do not always include responsible gambling requirements and there are no processes to make sure gambling on reserves is in compliance with provincial laws.

Another audit looked at procurement of professional services in six departments and found opportunities for improvement.

"Procurement requirements were generally followed but departments need to do more to make sure purchases are properly approved," Mr. Pickup said.

The report notes that government completes limited monitoring to verify that the procurement act and policy are followed.

While contracts were monitored to make sure government received the services it paid for, in some cases, contracts were signed after work started and in some situations, there were no contracts. Important contract terms related to penalty clauses and dispute resolution were also missing.

For the second time in the past year, the auditor general found that government departments may not be following Canada Revenue Agency requirements when they hire contractors.

"Government needs to look at the risk of not following the agency rules across departments and take appropriate action to correct any issues identified."

In his followup of recommendations the office made in 2011 and 2012, the auditor general found that six departments and agencies are doing a better job of implementing recommendations from his office.

"While the 57 per cent overall implementation rate is only a slight improvement from last year's 50 per cent rate, it is encouraging to see the improvement to 70 per cent or more in these six organizations," Mr. Pickup said.

"However, some entities had very low rates of less than 50 per cent and should look to those organizations with higher implementation rates for ways to more quickly deal with issues they know exist."

The 82-page report contains 25 recommendations to government.

The full report is available at www.oag-ns.ca.

FOR BROADCAST USE:

In his June report, Auditor General Michael Pickup says the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture has limited ability to make operators follow environmental monitoring requirements and may not always be aware of disease outbreaks at aquaculture sites.

The report also says the Department of Health and Wellness does not know if treatment services are helping Nova Scotians with gambling problems and the department needs to do more to make sure those with gambling problems look for help and receive the services they need.

Mr. Pickup's report says government generally follows procurement rules in purchasing professional services but there are opportunities for improvement. It says departments need to make sure services are properly approved and contracts are signed before work starts.

The report also notes that some departments and agencies are doing a better job of implementing past recommendations from the auditor general, while others still need to make significant improvements.

The 82-page spring report contains 25 recommendations to government. The full report is available on the auditor general's website.

-30-

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