



*Department of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and
Culture*

Rural Communities Council

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Co-Chair's Message - Annual Report - June 2025 | 4 |
| Activities | 5 |
| Membership | 6 |
| Summary of Deliberations 2024-25 | 7 |
| Looking Ahead | 9 |
| Appendix A: Position Statements/Policy Brief | 10 |
| Appendix B: Rural Communities Council Member Backgrounds | 12 |
| Appendix C: Terms of Reference | 14 |



Co-Chair's Message - Annual Report - 2025

In 2024-25, the Rural Communities Council continued to provide input to the Prince Edward Island government on how a rural lens can be applied to government policies. A rural lens ensures that policy-makers are aware of rural realities so that rural communities can fully benefit from government policies.

This year the Rural Communities Council formally participated in four themed presentations relevant to rural PEI, noted below,

- Immigration
- Food Security
- Emergency Preparedness
- Trade

The Council also met with Minister Bell and Deputy Minister Koughan, responsible for Rural and Regional Development, to discuss rural priorities. This includes rural transportation challenges, the importance of rural community infrastructure, and necessity of rural immigration for business and community prosperity. Additionally, the council raised the pressing need for a province-wide land-use plan which is necessary for the success of many rural PEI sectors.

As we move into the sixth year of the Council's mandate, we will continue to identify specific issues, undertake research, consult, and provide feedback. To date the council has identified the following topics to consult on:

- Rural healthcare
- Municipalities
- Climate Change
- Others to be determined

As co-chairs, we would like to thank our fellow Council members for their commitment and contributions to the Council. Every member brings a unique perspective that represents their lived reality in a variety of PEI rural communities. Together, these perspectives help to ensure that the voices of rural Islanders from tip to tip are heard by provincial policy-makers.

Finally, we want thank the team at Rural and Regional Development for their support and coordination of the council. We look forward to continuing to work together to identify rural priorities and provide a voice in government policy.

Sincerely,

Co-Chairs: Patti-Sue Lee and Terry Nabuurs



Activities

During the year, the *Rural Communities Council* met on the following dates to discuss the topics listed below:

| Meeting Date: | Meeting Topics or Presentations: |
|------------------|--|
| November 6, 2024 | Immigration |
| December 4, 2024 | Food Security |
| February 5, 2025 | Discussion with Minister Bell and Deputy Minister Koughan on rural matters Emergency Preparedness |
| April 9, 2025 | Trade |

Position Statements were created for two of the topics discussed by the Council in 2024-25. They include Poverty Reduction and Food Security, and Emergency Preparedness. A policy brief was also developed on the topic of trade. These documents can be found in Appendix A.

The purpose of the position statements and policy briefs produced by the Council is to provide background on how issues affect rural PEI communities and give recommendations to the provincial government and their stakeholders on how policies can be shaped to ensure rural matters are taken into consideration. Staff from Rural and Regional Development share these widely with government counterparts to promote the Council's voice on relevant matters.



Membership

Below is a list of Council members for 2024-25. The terms of reference state that the council will be 8-12 members. In 2024-25, there were nine members with three vacancies. The Council aims to be geographically and gender balanced with two co-chairpersons. The council also seeks to be representative of key rural industries and communities (agriculture, fisheries, indigenous, francophone, etc.)

| Member Name | County | Term Start | Term End |
|--------------------------|--------|-------------|-----------|
| Alaba Boluwade | Kings | August 2024 | July 2026 |
| Terry Nabuurs – Co-chair | Kings | August 2023 | July 2025 |
| Tyler Gould | Kings | August 2023 | July 2025 |
| Mike J. Randall | Prince | August 2023 | July 2025 |
| Jason Ramsay | Prince | August 2023 | July 2025 |
| Michael Gallant | Queens | August 2024 | July 2026 |
| Margie Burns | Queens | August 2023 | July 2025 |
| Patti-Sue Lee – Co-chair | Queens | August 2023 | July 2025 |
| Pamela Montgomery | Queens | August 2024 | July 2026 |

Member biographies can be found in Appendix C.



Summary of Deliberations 2024-25

Below are the key takeaways from Council meetings in 2024-25.

| Topic | Key Take-aways |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Immigration | <p>Recognizing that immigration is a responsibility of both provincial and federal governments, the council recommends that both actors focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data and Analytics – Develop increased data collection on immigration, which could lead to higher immigrant retention rates in rural PEI and improve the quality of life for newcomers. This could include administering surveys to those who immigrate to PEI and for employers who are or have employed newcomers.• Policy – The council encourages the development of policies that would allow newcomers to work for multiple employers so that businesses can access consistent employment year-round. In addition, the council recommends continued government investment in community navigator positions that play a strong role in welcoming and helping newcomers settle in rural communities.• Public Perception and Education - The council advocates for public education campaigns that address misconceptions about immigration and the important contribution of newcomers in PEI.• Rural Immigration and Retention – To enhance immigration in rural communities, the council advocates that government support policies that incentivize newcomers to settle in rural communities and also align immigration strategies with rural strategies such as rural municipal plans. |
| Poverty Reduction and Food Security | <p>Poverty, homelessness and food security are pressing issues in rural PEI, even if they may not be as visible to the broader public. The council stresses the importance of a comprehensive and holistic approach to address the interconnected issues surrounding food insecurity including addiction, mental health, and housing. It is equally essential to combat the stigma attached to these issues and open the public's eyes to rural poverty.</p> |



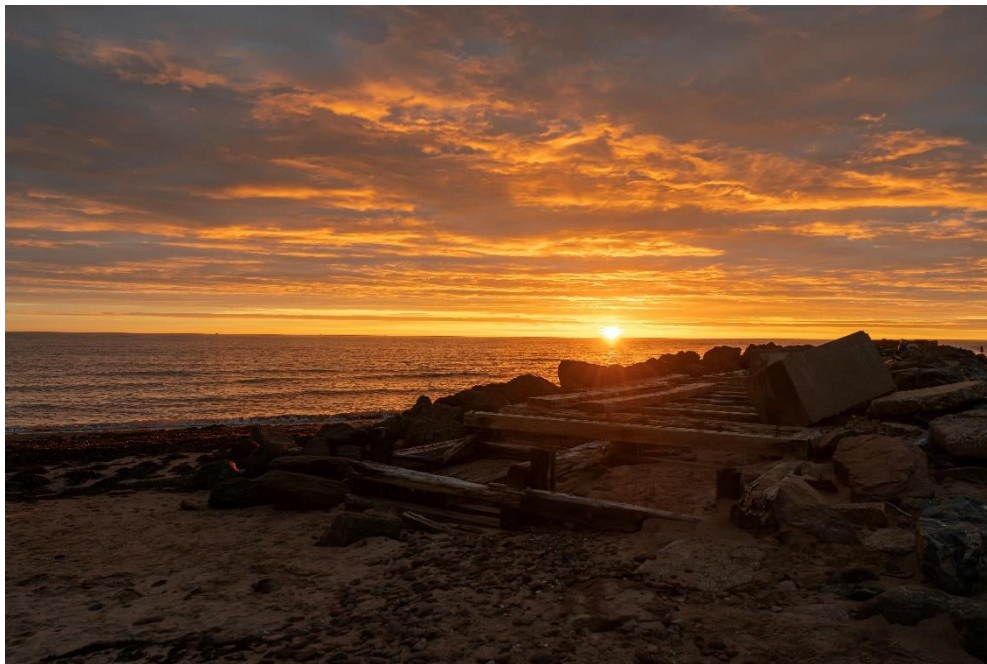
| Topic | Key Take-aways |
|--|--|
| Discussion with Minister Bell and Deputy Minister Koughan | <p>The council shared topics that they have discussed in the past along with key issues facing rural communities. This includes the current trade uncertainty between Canada and the United States, MSX and the fisheries industry, immigration, and the importance of community infrastructure in rural communities.</p> <p>The council also highlighted the importance of land-use planning. The council has prioritized this as a key priority over the past number of years given rural communities' reliance on land for economic and community prosperity.</p> |
| Emergency Preparedness Strategy | <p>The Council encourages the government in its work to continually evaluate its strategies to protect rural communities in times of emergencies. It is essential in these plans that all types of populations are included in plans, particularly segments of populations that may be underrepresented in rural communities. Additionally, plans must consider the differences between rural communities situated in municipalities or non-incorporated areas and how this might affect emergency plans.</p> |
| Trade | <p>Rural PEI plays a critical role in PEI's export market. Recent trade uncertainty between Canada and the United States has illuminated the importance of ongoing and adaptive policy from the government to grow rural businesses potential and profitability. Specifically, the council recommends that the government focus on the following areas to grow PEI's trade market:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with businesses to identify new export opportunities while recognizing the continued potential of existing export streams, despite trade uncertainties.• Ensure businesses can access information related to the government supports they are eligible for.• Continue to provide ongoing services and support to businesses that are responsive and adaptable to the current and future trade context. |



Looking Ahead

The Council looks forward to continuing to meet in 2025-26 and discussing government initiatives and policies that impact rural PEI communities. The council will continue to work with staff from Rural and Regional Development to disseminate the work of the Council and report to the Minister responsible for Rural and Regional Development on key rural PEI matters.

The Council will also be actively recruiting more members to be part of the Council in 2025-26. Two members finished their terms, plus an additional vacant position has left four vacancies to be filled.





Appendix A: Position Statements/Policy Brief

Food Security

RURAL COMMUNITIES COUNCIL

December 2024

Position Statements on Food Security



Resilience, Sustainability, Compassion

The Rural Communities Council would like to emphasize the importance of acknowledging that poverty, homelessness, and food insecurity are pressing issues in rural areas, even if they are not visible to the broader public. The council stresses the importance of a comprehensive and holistic approach to address the interconnected issues surrounding food insecurity including addiction, mental health, and housing. It is equally essential to combat the stigma attached to these issues and open eyes to rural poverty.

Resilience: The Rural Communities Council believes that resilience is fundamental in addressing the long-term food security challenges faced by rural populations. This includes expanding mental health services, addiction recovery programs, and housing support that align with food security efforts.

Sustainability: The Council advocates for the development of sustainable food systems that prioritize local production and self-sufficiency. We emphasize the importance of growing food for local, by local, and support localized solutions.

Compassion: Compassionate approaches will help address the emotional and psychological barriers that often prevent individuals from seeking assistance, while providing the direct support needed to alleviate hardship. Local solutions should be designed with the specific needs of these populations in mind, ensuring that policies are accessible and relevant to rural realities.



Emergency Preparedness

RURAL COMMUNITIES COUNCIL

**Position Statements on
Emergency Preparedness
Strategy**



February 2025

Strengthening Emergency Response for All

The Rural Communities Council would like to commend the continued efforts of the Emergency Measures Organization (EMO) to help prepare the Island to respond to emergencies by building resiliency. The Council supports EMO's efforts to continue ensuring all Islanders, especially vulnerable people living in rural communities including underrepresented populations (the homeless, Amish community, tourists/seasonal residents, etc.), are considered as part of emergency plans. Regular review of systems and plans in place can help identify gaps and ensure continued improvement in preparedness.

Communication

Municipalities play a vital role in supporting residents during emergencies, and the Rural Communities Council recognizes the importance of clearly communicating these roles and available services. Special attention must be given to residents in rural or non-municipal areas to ensure they are informed about the support available to them in times of crisis. The Council also emphasizes the importance of encouraging personal preparedness and neighbor check-ins within rural communities. Outreach efforts, such as promoting reception centres and municipal emergency plans, remain essential for strengthening community resilience.



Trade

Policy Brief: Rural PEI and Trade Winter 2025

In 2024, over \$2.6 billion worth of goods was exported internationally. Rural PEI plays a critical role in the province's export success, with many of the most successful exporters based in small communities, including agriculture, seafood processing, manufacturing, and aerospace. The threat and imposition of tariffs from nations like the United States presents a major threat to businesses that rely on these exports for revenue. For rural businesses, tariffs not only threaten their bottom-lines but hamper rural economic growth, which is critical to the well-being of communities who rely on these businesses for employment and their goods.

The recent trade uncertainty has illuminated the importance of ongoing and adaptive policy that targets the specific needs of businesses that grow their potential and profitability in communities across PEI. The Rural Communities Council advises government to take into account the following considerations:

The Rural Communities Council (RCC) provides advice and recommendations to Government regarding rural topics related to the themes of people, communities, environment wellness, and economics and explores opportunities for development in rural PEI

For further information, please contact the Rural Policy Specialist - kderoo@gov.pe.ca

Work with businesses to identify new export opportunities while recognizing the continued potential of existing export streams: The RCC strongly recommends that businesses take advantage of the expertise available through Innovation PEI to provide knowledge on export processes and identify opportunities for businesses to participate on trade missions. The RCC encourages Innovation PEI to streamline processes that help businesses identify new export opportunities across the globe while not forgetting the existing trade potential in the US given how much is already exported to the country (73% of exports).

Ensure businesses can accessibly access information related to Government's available supports: The RCC encourages the development of a communication plan that easily identify the supports and expertise available to businesses of all types and in all regions. As part of this, it is recommended that Innovation PEI explore the possibility of developing a physical or digital "one-stop shop" for businesses to identify available supports. This could be similar to what is provided through the Rural Action Centres in rural PEI. The council also calls on both provincial and federal levels of government to work closely together to coordinate information and supports related to export information and opportunities.

Continue to provide ongoing services and supports to businesses that are responsive and adaptable to the current and future trade context: The RCC urges government to continue to respond accordingly to the US tariff situation by focusing on the diversification of trade for businesses and providing funding support or relief where necessary. However, this support should not be temporary. Identifying new trade opportunities for businesses will be a long-term process that the government will need to continually invest in order to create resilient economies. As part of this, the RCC encourages the creation or adaptation of existing programs to build businesses capacity to successfully export that match trade trends. This could include education on using technology like Artificial Intelligence to understand the logistics and patterns of trade, providing marketing advice, or creating access to a shared service provider who can provide advice or services to businesses on trade.



Appendix B: Rural Communities Council Member Backgrounds

Alaba Boluwade (Dr.): Residing in Cardigan, Dr. Alaba Boluwade is an Assistant Professor at the Canadian Center for Climate Change at UPEI. He is also a Chartered Engineer and also holds an MBA from Wilfrid Laurier University.

Terry Nabuurs: Originally from Cardigan, Terry is an entrepreneur owning several businesses including Lone Oak, the Wheelhouse, Nabours Gardens and blueberry fields. Terry has also taught at Montague high school.

Tyler Gould: Residing in Scotchfort, Tyler is a member of the Abegweit First Nation and has experience working in community economic development as holds both a BBA from UPEI and an MBA from Laurentian University.

Mike J. Randall: Residing in Lennox Island First Nation, Mike J. Randall has been an economic development officer for almost 20 years and is currently the Executive Director of the Lennox Island Development Corporation.

Jason Ramsay: Residing in O'Leary, Jason was the chair of former West Prince Regional Economic Advisory Committee. He is the General Manager McCain Fertilizer & Produce Inc. PEI. Jason very involved in his community and local school.

Michael Gallant: Residing in Hunter River, Michael Gallant currently lives on his family farm and is a retired, senior military officer with previous board experience.

Margie Burns: Residing in Vernon River, Margie Burns is a registered nurse with over 20 years of clinical experience. Margie has taught at the UPEI Faculty of Nursing after being an ICU nurse, as well as completed her doctoral studies which focused on the complexity of rural experiences.

Patti-Sue Lee: Residing in Stanhope, Patti-Sue Lee has over 25 years of experience in the federal public service in senior management positions. She also is a small business owner in rural PEI and holds a bachelor's degree in Tourism and Hospitality Management from Ryerson University.

Pam Schurman Montgomery: Residing in Stanley Bridge, Pamela Montgomery is the Chief Executive Officer at Habitat for Humanity PEI Inc and holds a B.A. in Economics and an Executive MBA.



Appendix C: Terms of Reference

MANDATE

To provide advice and make recommendations to Government regarding rural topics related to the themes of people, communities, the environment and wellness and to explore opportunities for development on PEI.

KEY OBJECTIVES

Duties of the Rural Communities Councils will include:

- Examine, discuss, and review Government strategies through a rural lens to identify potential rural impacts of policies and decisions.
- Identify opportunities to enhance rural population growth in each region and recommend opportunities to improve inclusiveness within rural PEI communities.
- Engage with industry, academia, and government partners to understand the complex issues related to people, communities, wellness, and the environment in PEI.
- Provide regular advice on complex issues identified by the Regional Economic Advisory Councils including (but not limited to): education, healthcare, housing, labour market, aging population, out-migration of PEI youth, etc.
- Collaborate with communities, stakeholders, and groups such as Partnership for Growth, Development Corporations, Rural Action Centre's, and Youth Futures Council to promote community development opportunities that support regional growth.
-

MEMBERSHIP

The Rural Communities Council will be composed of eight to twelve individuals, including two co-chairs, representing each region (West, Central, and East) equally. Members will apply through Engage PEI.



SUPPORT

The Rural Communities Council will be supported by staff from the Department of Fisheries and Communities, however, other government departments will often be called upon to provide information or support on issues that relate to their mandate.

Support is defined as meeting and engagement readiness, meeting management processes and formal communication channels, but not limited to:

- **Agenda:** formal agenda setting with Co-chairs; supporting research and/or meeting content;
- **Minutes:** formal minutes prepared for Council approval at next scheduled meeting, with draft sent to Council members within 2 weeks of previous meeting;
- **Reports:** Year End Reports on Council activities and positions
- **Recorded Information Management:** all recorded information to be stored per records management policy
- **In-Meeting Facilitation:** meeting facilitation support to co-chairs, as required;
- **Communications:** creation of formal communication inputs to, and outputs from, Council meetings, per government communications policy and in conjunction with Council's Co-Chairs for final draft approvals (i.e., Position Statements, Presentations to Council Members using Rural Lens) and designed to foster collaboration with islanders around issues identified as important to rural Prince Edward Island by RCC members.
- **Facilities:** meeting logistics including locations, equipment, etc.

TERMS OF OFFICE

Appointments will be for two years, renewable once. Some initial appointments may be made for three years. Meetings will be held at least four times per year and members are expected to attend the majority of these meetings annually to maintain membership. Quorum for meetings is 50% plus 1. Meetings will be held centrally with



teleconference options available. Decisions will be achieved by consensus; if consensus is not achieved, dissenting views will be reflected in the record of the meeting.

REPORTING

The Rural Communities Council will maintain records of meetings and will provide quarterly updates to the Deputy Ministers Panel (DMP). The Co-chairs will make a formal presentation to the Minister's Council once annually. The DMP will deliver formal responses to the advice provided by the RCC at least two times each year.

CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

The Rural Communities Council will discuss agenda items with an open style that ultimately results in key points that can be effectively communicated to decision makers on behalf of rural Islanders. Consensus decision making might be required to identify key issues from complex topics and broad-based discussions. Consensus is defined as consensus-minus-one whereby more than one member in disagreement will lead to further discussion and/or a choice suspend the discussion point indefinitely.¹

Fisheries and Communities staff will support Council Co-Chairs and members to achieve consensus.

ENGAGEMENT

The Council Co-chairs will meet with the Premier and Minister once per year in addition to regular council meetings.

High-level Council activities and outcomes will be posted to government website for Islanders to engage with Council, per government policy and/or communications protocols.

¹ American Heart Association. (n.d.). Consensus-Based Decision-Making Processes. https://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@mwa/documents/downloadable/ucm_454080.pdf.



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