



Securing a Sustainable Future for BC's Forest Communities

Speech to the Stand Up for the North Conference

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Check Against Delivery

On November 4 and 5, 2006, a conference was held at the College of New Caledonia in Prince George to discuss the future of Interior communities in light of the unprecedented mountain pine beetle infestation in BC's Interior forests. The Stand up for the North conference received financial support from a number of municipal councils and unions. It included speakers from a diverse array of groups including: First Nations, sawmill and wood pellet companies, selective logging advocates, forest scientists, community foresters, woodworkers, pulp and paper mill employees, municipal councilors and mayors, economic development officers, environmental campaigners and others. Billed as a non-partisan event, speaking requests were also extended to local MLAs. Only one MLA, NDP forestry critic Bob Simpson, accepted the invitation. The following remarks at the Stand Up for the North conference were part of a speech given by Ben Parfitt, resource policy analyst with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives BC Office.

Before talking a bit about where the opportunities lie to strengthen the hands of resource-dependent communities through forest policy changes, I thought it would be instructive to look at two events that occurred in and around one community in BC's Interior earlier this year. The community is Quesnel. And the events capture, I think, why more community tenures are required in BC and why the province should be thinking far more carefully and creatively about how it allocates publicly owned timber in the months and years ahead.

For many decades now, the forest industry has been the economic driver of Quesnel's economy. The city has pulp mills, sawmills, panel mills and a leading value-added wood product manufacturing facility among others. As a result, it is expected to go through an extremely trying period in the next five or ten years as the present logging boom is followed by the logging bust. In Quesnel's case, however, the pain may be even more extreme than that experienced in other Interior communities. First, the forests around Quesnel were already subject to significant "uplifts" in logging rates in decades past due to earlier insect attacks. Now, as we all know, the forests surrounding the community are experiencing an unprecedented rise in logging activities due to the current mountain pine beetle outbreak. A combination of past and present logging activities that well exceeded what can be

sustained, means that the reduction in future logging rates will be all the deeper; and with the reductions, the likely closure of many mills.

There are other reasons to expect that Quesnel may suffer more than other communities in this regard. This is primarily because the surrounding forest has a higher percentage of stands weighed heavily to older pine trees, most of which are now dead. Other regions where pine beetles are active contain higher amounts of “mixed” forest, where pine trees are found in significant number but other species such as spruce are equally if not more prevalent. Consequently, when declines in future logging rates occur as available supplies of commercial timber run out, Quesnel will take a harder hit than some other communities, although all Interior communities will be affected to one degree or another.

All of this means that it is in Quesnel’s short-term and long-term interest to plan now for the transition and to look very, very carefully at what existing businesses in the community may be best positioned to withstand the shocks that we all know are coming. And clearly, that is what the city’s elected leaders and people who devote their working lives to charting new economic paths for the region are doing. The big question is whether the Province, which controls public forestlands and forest policies, is listening.

The two events I will now describe tend to indicate that if the Province is listening, it’s not responding; at least not in the appropriate way.

The first event occurred in early August. It was accompanied with little fanfare and took the form of a letter written by Quesnel mayor, Nate Belo, to British Columbia’s Minister of Forests, Rich Coleman. In the letter, Belo outlined Quesnel City Council’s concerns about changes in provincial forest policies that were resulting in a growing shortage of available timber to forest companies in the value-added sector of the industry.

One company in particular — C & C Wood Products — was the principal focus of the letter. C & C has operated in the Quesnel region since the 1970s and is famous for pioneering the manufacture of wood panel products from very small diameter pine trees. Like many companies operating in the value-added sector, C & C has an enviable track record when it comes to generating a lot of jobs from a comparatively small amount of timber. So much so that one of the higher profile environmental groups in the province — the Western Canada Wilderness Committee — said as far back as the early 1990s that C & C was a model of social, economic and environmental responsibility. Back then, the committee’s forest campaigners noted that for every 15 truckloads of logs C & C received it employed one person in its milling operations. Nearby, at commodity lumber mills, nearly seven times as much wood was needed to generate one job.

What prompted Belo and fellow municipal councilors to write the letter was that at a time of increased logging activities in and around Quesnel, the city’s pre-eminent value-added mill was reporting that it couldn’t get wood.

How could this be? After all, the Interior of BC is currently in the midst of the largest sustained logging boom in history. Collectively, logging increases in a number of timber supply areas in response to the pine beetle means that it is permissible to log an additional 15 million cubic metres or

so of timber per year. Yet at the same time that logging rates have surged, provincial government forest policies have put an end to making timber exclusively available to those companies that generate the most jobs.

I'll talk more about the demise of those programs in a few minutes. Suffice to say now, however, that Belo and others believe that the death of such programs runs counter to the interests of their communities. As their letter to Coleman noted:

"C & C . . . provides more jobs per cubic metre than any other mill in Quesnel and produces outstanding quality paneling."

"However, your Ministry has changed the fibre supply award system through the Forest Act and the operations of BC Timber Sales, which could result in specialty manufacturers such as C & C Wood Products actually losing their small fibre allotment while other mills are obtaining ever increasing volume due to the pine-beetle damaged wood situation in our timber supply area."

One reads Belo's letter with a sense of disbelief. The Interior is in the midst of the largest logging increases ever witnessed — a one-time boom the likes of which has not been seen and will not be seen again in our lifetimes. Given such circumstances, it seems perverse that well-established companies such as C & C should be scrambling to find wood. Yet they are, and communities like Quesnel fear they could be all the poorer for it.

Now, let's turn briefly to the second event. This one occurred in mid September when the Ministry of Forests issued a one-page press release trumpeting the fact that it had just awarded Ainsworth Lumber Co. Ltd. the rights to log up to 10.5 million cubic metres of mountain pine beetle-attacked timber. The release got substantially more play than did Quesnel Council's entreaties to the provincial government. Perhaps this was because it seemingly held out the promise of a whole number of new jobs in the Interior in the not too distant future.

The announcement outlined how Ainsworth had been offered 700,000 cubic metres of timber from the Quesnel region in each of the next 15 years. In exchange for all that wood — nearly four times the annual wood needs of C & C's Quesnel operations — the Province said Ainsworth would be required to "construct or expand a timber processing facility that produces something other than dimensional lumber."

The release went on to say that it was Ainsworth's intention to spend somewhere around \$300 million building a "single-line" mill that produced Oriented Strand Board, a sheathing product. The release went on to say that the mill might at some future date be expanded to include a second production line. In the interim, however, if the first phase of the mill materialized, 175 new jobs would be generated in the mill processing OSB and another 200 jobs in the bush cutting down the trees to furnish the mill.

On the surface, it would seem hard to argue against the merits of such a project. Until, that is, one thinks through things a little bit. First, there was no indication in the government's news release about where exactly such a mill would be built. Ainsworth already operates an OSB mill a considerable distance south of Quesnel in 100 Mile House. Could a new line be added to the mill there and any logs

subsequently cut in the Quesnel area shipped down the line? Is it even possible for OSB — which traditionally requires the use of a lot of hardwood in its furnish — to realistically be made from a steady diet of beetle-attacked pine logs? Or would there have to be some corresponding increase in the harvesting of hardwood trees to augment Ainsworth's needs? Could such a new facility actually run without jeopardizing the future viability of other mills already operating in the Quesnel area? And by other mills I don't just mean value-added facilities, but existing sawmills. And sawmills, let's remember, make products we all use. As well, they are often the first link in a chain that includes value-added manufacturers. Could other companies with existing operations utilize timber that the government has now assigned to Ainsworth until such time as the company actually builds its mill?

The other thing briefly mentioned in the government's press release, but not discussed in any detail, was that Ainsworth had a year earlier locked up rights to potentially log beetle-attacked pine trees in both the Quesnel area and in and around Prince George. The awards effectively denied timber to other companies like C & C, companies that would have been able to do something with the wood immediately. A year later, following backroom negotiations, the province allowed Ainsworth to walk away from its Prince George obligations, leaving just the Quesnel project alive. In effect a year was lost, a year in which the Province, working closely with local communities, may have developed plans to ensure that at least existing companies like C & C had access to the wood they needed to ensure the smooth operation of their milling facilities.

Why the interest in awarding big allotments of timber to new operations that have yet to be built over existing companies with proven track records in generating much-needed jobs in local communities? The answer, I think, is captured perfectly in the last paragraph of the government's Ainsworth announcement. The paragraph says, and I quote:

"Developing major forest Licences to recover maximum economic value from beetle-attacked forests in the Quesnel and Prince George timber supply areas is part of the provincial Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan."

Curiously absent from the government's promotional bumph are words like *priority*, *community*, *social good*, *small*, *local* or *value-added*. It's as if the Province is trapped in a mindset that only big mega projects will suffice in response to big events like the pine beetle infestation. Lost is any sense of the challenges facing individual communities. What is needed to give them a leg up in a future where there will be far less raw material to work with? Which is why, of course, we are here today.

The words *tenure reform* are often bandied about when it comes to addressing what is needed to reinvigorate and diversify the forest industry in BC and to bring a modicum of certainty to resource-dependent communities. Many people would like nothing better than to see the current tenure system shredded and replaced by something else entirely. And I understand the sentiment. In my view, however, this is not something that is likely to happen any time soon. Rather, I think gradual reforms will come about as a result of such things as resolution of treaties with First Nations and, I venture to say, somewhere not too far down the road when a number of major mills close as wood supplies run out. Such events will shape the face of the new forest tenure system in the province. But in the meantime, I do believe that there are opportunities within the existing framework that we ought to be promoting for the sake of assisting communities. And we ought to get on with it.

Let's not forget that the Province of BC through BC Timber Sales is the single largest holder of Crown forest in the province. And what I want to talk about today are some modest things that the Province could begin doing now by changing the direction of that program to better address the needs of Interior communities, local sawmills and value-added enterprises by giving them either area-based tenures or dedicated pools of wood that would help to sustain their operations.

Community forest tenures are not a new thing. In fact, one of the older Tree Farm Licences in BC is held by the community of Mission, near Vancouver. The TFL has its origins in the Great Depression when Mission's elected council found itself with a growing portfolio of Crown grant lands that had reverted to it when property owners could no longer pay their taxes.

As more and more properties were foreclosed, the council found itself owning some 1,200 hectares of land, most of it forested. An initial attempt by the community to have those lands rolled into an area-based forest tenure was rebuffed by the Province in 1946. But a decade later, a second appeal succeeded. The 1,200 hectares of land owned by the municipality were rolled along with another 9,200 hectares of provincial Crown land into a Tree Farm Licence.

Over the ensuing half century, more than 1.2 million cubic metres of timber has been logged on the TFL. In excess of 3.2 million trees have been planted and a growing area of trees have been spaced in order to increase the future volume and value of second –and –third-growth timber.

The financial benefits of the TFL to the community have been significant. Kim Allan, director of forest management for Mission, calculates that since 1959 this small area-based tenure has provided the community average annual profits (in 2004 dollars) of \$300,000. Profits generated by the TFL have allowed the community to invest \$685,000 in a local library and archives; \$132,000 in a new fire hall and truck; \$170,000 in a local ice-rink conversion; and, more recently, \$1.2 million in a municipal budget stabilization fund after Mission, like other municipal governments, was confronted with cost offloading by the Province.

More recently, we have witnessed an upsurge of interest in community forest tenures. And the province has begun to respond. In the past few years, it has awarded close to 20 new such tenures to non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities alike. To the west of Prince George, the community of Burns Lake was among the first to receive such a licence.

In late May of this year, I had the good fortune to be in Burns Lake on the occasion of the Community Forest Association of BC's annual convention. Attendees to the conference got to see firsthand how Burns Lake's Community Forest Corporation had invested in a 75 per cent share of a local small sawmilling complex. Today, the mill turns out specialty timbers for the oil and gas industry in northeastern BC. It also makes specially profiled logs for use in log home buildings and, more recently, has invested in equipment to make wood dowels from small diameter trees.

In addition to forward integrating from logging into milling, the Corporation has taken the interesting step of investing in a new business venture that is making it more attractive for smaller and larger businesses to stay and work in the region. It developed a high-speed wireless Internet service for the community, which included investments in towers and the like to make Burns Lake a wired community.

Today, the community's area-based forest tenure spreads across some 60,000 hectares of land and takes in pretty much all that the eye can see from the village site itself. The normal, pre-beetle cut associated with that land base is about 87,000 cubic metres per year. Although at present with the preponderance of dead pine trees, somewhere between 300,000 and 350,000 cubic metres is being logged.

To be sure, there are challenges aplenty for the young venture. During a tour of forestry operations, for example, delegates to the annual general meeting were asked to say what they would do in terms of work in some timber stands that had been partially cut prior to the beetle outbreak only to see their pine trees attacked and killed by the insects. Some of the forestry technicians and foresters to look at such sites felt that some kind of in-fill planting would be required, but that it should be possible to leave the existing living and dead trees on site during such a planting exercise. Others favored taking out the dead trees, utilizing that wood fibre right now, and then replanting. There are also challenges for the local milling facility, which does not have a secure use or buyer for the wood waste building up on the mill site. One of the more intriguing ideas I heard expressed during my visit was that the wood waste should be used as a heating source for new greenhouses that could be built in the valley to grow food crops and other plants for local consumption. I liked that idea. There was a wonderful circularity to it. But the thing that impressed me the most was that these ideas were coming from community members themselves — people who were actively engaged as a result of their direct stake in the forest, in figuring out just how locally owned resources could be managed for maximum local benefit.

I believe it is vitally important for more communities in the north and elsewhere in the Interior to be afforded the same opportunities — and challenges — that Burns Lake has. And the source for that timber is readily at hand. The source is BC Timber Sales, the largest forest tenure holder in the province. And all that would be required to make such tenure transfers possible would be for BC Timber Sales to divert more of its portfolio away from “open” timber auctions — which I will suggest in a moment aren't that open anyway — to new community tenures.

The other thing the government should be doing right away is seriously rethinking how it goes about awarding forest resources and revenues to First Nations' communities. Unlike the forest tenures held by Mission or Burns Lake, the offers that the Province is currently making to First Nations are one-time allotments of volumes of timber and one-time allotments of cash. In an upcoming research paper for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, I will be dissecting the province's evolving relationship with First Nations and the sharing of forest resources in greater detail. But for now let me say that while the government should be commended for embarking on the path of sharing more resources and revenues with First Nations, the model it is pursuing is fundamentally flawed. Offers of timber and offers of cash are, as I said, one-off events. They are to volumes of wood, not to areas of forest. And as forestry professionals in this room will attest, if you want to manage forest resources for their sustained use over time you must have access to defined areas of land. One-time offers of timber volumes, do not lend themselves to sustainability and they most certainly present major obstacles for groups or individuals when it comes to making sound business plans that are likely to attract investment capital.

Since the government has already amassed a considerable amount of timber in its hands to facilitate timber transfers to First Nations — timber that it took back from companies and handsomely

compensated those companies for — there is absolutely no reason that it could not offer First Nations defined areas of forestland as an interim step toward long-overdue treaty settlements. It is my strong belief that if it did so, not only would First Nation communities benefit, but so would non-Aboriginal, neighboring communities as well. It doesn't seem a stretch to think, for example, that if the Burns Lake Band was awarded its own area-based forest tenure, a wonderful partnership might emerge between the band and the local community of Burns Lake. And that it would be in everybody's interests to see such developments emerge.

While on the subject of community forest tenures, we heard some talk during yesterday's session about stumpage breaks. It seems to me that in the spirit of encouraging communities to take more of a direct interest in managing local forest resources, that the Province should continue its current practice of offering a discounted stumpage rate to those communities. It should do so, moreover, without fear of running afoul of the Softwood Lumber Agreement, as the timber pricing policies in place at the time of the agreement were deemed to be acceptable and stumpage breaks for community forest tenure holders were already in place.

Looking back to the situation in Quesnel for a moment, it also doesn't seem a stretch to think that in the event that Quesnel had such a forest tenure it would be in a strong position to allocate timber supplies to who it saw fit. Since companies like C & C lack secure timber supplies, while other companies operating sawmills in the city have most of their wood supply needs met through long-term tenures, Quesnel City council might well decide in the event it held a community forest tenure that it would throw its weight behind the local value-added mill.

So if we are truly interested in seeing northern communities and those communities elsewhere in the province better able to chart a course for themselves in the years ahead, more community tenures are one way to go. And a radical shift in provincial forest policy would not be required to make it happen.

I mentioned a moment ago that we have a timber market in this province. So why, some of you might ask, can't companies such as C & C simply enter the market for what they need? The answer, as I alluded to earlier, is that it is very difficult for them to compete in a marketplace that is not, truly, open. And that challenge isn't just limited to C & C. We could include in the list other well-established companies in the lumber remanufacturing and value-added industry, companies like Brink Forest Products here in Prince George and Jackpine Forest Products in Williams Lake.

In years past, these companies were able to obtain wood through a special bidding system set up specifically to provide wood to value-added mills. Only value-added producers, and nobody else, could access wood through the program, which was specifically designed to encourage more jobs per cubic metre of wood utilized by the forest industry. Under timber allocation and pricing reforms introduced by this provincial government, that program was scrapped. Most disturbingly, it was scrapped as part of a broad package of reforms all aimed at placating the US lumber lobby, which as we all know not only succeeded in getting BC to change its timber pricing policies, but once those changes were made hit us and other Canadian provinces with export caps and export taxes under the Softwood Lumber Agreement.

The result of the changes is that all forest companies, big or small, commodity or specialty, are meant to compete in open market settings for whatever they need, with the highest price winning access to

the timber. But it is extremely hard to see how, in fact, the playing field has been leveled. Consider for a moment that the top 10 lumber makers in BC control 75 per cent of production, and that the top 10 companies in the province directly control about 60 per cent of all tenured wood supply. Three companies in the Interior dominate — Canfor, West Fraser and Tolko. On the Coast, one company — Western Forest Products — directly controls one in every two logs on public forestlands. No one should doubt under the circumstances that when it comes to competing for wood on the open market these companies, with their assured wood supplies and deep pockets are in a far, far better position than others to dominate the marketplace. And they do.

To truly level the playing field some have suggested that we need to completely sever forest tenures from forest product manufacturers. Everyone, if they are in the business of making lumber, pulp or value-added wood products, should have to bid on everything they need. I see the logic in this. But I question whether it is reasonable to expect that this government or any other would actually go so far as to do that. And even if they did, I don't think we would be immune from continued attack by the US softwood lumber lobby and others that would argue that the reforms have not gone far enough. If you want a truly "open" market, they would say, then all companies inside and outside BC should be able to bid on the wood. Furthermore, even in such an open market, I tend to think that large companies with sizeable milling capacity would continue to have a leg up on smaller companies. For that reason, I favor a mixture of open markets (plural) and some form of regulated markets. Communities would benefit, I believe, from logs being directed to locally run log yards where logs were carefully sorted, graded and bunched for sale. Such a model was pursued with great success in the community of Lumby, near Vernon. It could, with concerted effort, be replicated in a number of Interior communities bringing much-needed jobs as well as a reliable source of logs to big and small manufacturers alike.

The other thing we need is some market regulation. And by that I mean defined pools of timber that are made available only to value-added producers. Some would say 'well that can't happen under the Softwood Lumber Agreement'. To which I would respond, 'well, if that's the case, then we should walk away from that agreement as quickly as we can'. BC has a poor record when it comes to adding value to its wood products. For every dollar's worth of lumber produced in the province, we generate only 30 cents in value-added products. For every dollar of lumber produced in Ontario and Quebec, in contrast, the people and communities in those provinces benefit from \$1.50's worth of value-added forest product manufacturing. In a previous report for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives — *Getting More From Our Forests: Ten Proposals for Building Stability in BC's Forestry Communities* — I showed how value-added output in this province has stagnated over the past five years. It is no coincidence that this occurred over precisely the same timeframe that dedicated value-added timber sales came to an end in BC, and Crown corporations such as Forest Renewal BC, which played a pivotal role in promoting value-added wood products manufacturing, were dismantled. The simple truth is that earlier government interventions — despite their problems, and no one would deny that Forest Renewal *had* its problems — helped to foster desired social outcomes such as increasing the support for local, value-added manufacturers. If we want to see such businesses flourish, we need to ensure that they have access to the one resource that they need, which is the raw material. By reintroducing the idea of dedicated timber sales to this segment of the industry, we would be ensuring a healthier future for companies such as C & C. Once again, such a reform is easily achieved within the existing system. BC Timber Sales has the wood. It just needs to change how it allocates it.

There are two things more that I'd like to mention before closing and taking questions. The first concerns appurtenant mills: the linking of specific forest tenures held by companies and the operation of prescribed mills in particular communities. We heard yesterday that such provisions may ultimately be a drag on businesses by forcing them to maintain or to locate processing facilities in places that don't, from an economic perspective, make a lot of sense. In important respects, this argument has merit. If the government applied appurtenancy provisions too stringently, we would run into trouble. For example, as domestic lumber producers strive to become more efficient — an inevitability in commodity production where companies compete in the marketplace with virtually identical products — there will be a push for bigger, more efficient mills, which usually means more logs put through mills with fewer workers. It's easy to see how you can't insist on companies maintaining lumber mills everywhere, and making continuous investments in them, without quickly running into a situation where there simply are not enough logs to go around and a mill or two closes. But it's also easy to see that if we assign publicly owned timber to companies, and we don't insist that they make some investments in new mills, we could quickly end up in a situation where BC simply becomes a log supplier to companies outside of the province or outside of the country. There is a growing trend toward this on the Coast. And it may not be long before we see a flood of log exports from the Interior as well. There are, for example, proposals floating around to log massive amounts of beetle-attacked timber from the Interior and ship them in whole log form to countries like China where they would be turned into pellets for that energy-starved country.

So having some appurtenant mills makes sense. Now there are those who will say that this is not possible under the Softwood Lumber Agreement. And once again, I would say if that's the case then it's another good reason why that bad deal should be scrapped. But a careful read of the SLA shows, in fact, that the door is open to the provincial government making direct timber awards to companies if they make certain forest products. Products excluded from the SLA include among others wood trusses, I-Joist beams, pallets, garage doors, edge-glued products, and completed window and doorframes. Many of these products are in demand by homebuilders who are increasingly interested in having ready-to-install components delivered right to the building site. There is no reason why BC could not begin to allocate new timber on the basis of a requirement that the company receiving the new tenure build a mill to make one or more of these products. Furthermore, you will recall at the beginning of my talk how the BC government recently awarded forest tenure to Ainsworth on the condition that it construct an OSB mill. OSB is not covered under the SLA. And the SLA was clearly foremost in the government's mind when it awarded this recent tenure because the government said that in exchange for getting the tenure the winning company would have to build a mill to manufacture something other than dimensional lumber.

So appurtenancy is not a dead concept in this province. And once again, through BC Timber Sales, or through a further timber takeback, the Province could directly award new forest tenures on the condition that investments in new mills were made.

Finally, a word on returning funds to resource-dependent communities. Clearly, the great challenge before Burns Lake, Quesnel, Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, Prince George, Houston and a host of other communities is how to diversify local economies both by creating a more robust and varied forest industry and expanding economic opportunities in other areas. Many, many people involved in community economic development are thinking about these things. They are far better able than I am to say what needs to be done. But I think to a person they would say, along with their local municipal

council members, that funding is desperately needed to assist communities in making the transition, a transition that will require communities to learn to do a lot more with a lot less raw materials.

In previous papers for the CCPA, I have advocated turning a portion of stumpage revenues back to communities to assist in economic development initiatives. I believe strongly that the money to do so should come, in part, from the stumpage fees now being generated from the beetle cut. It is the height of financial imprudence for the provincial government to be channeling such funds into general revenues when it knows full well that this is a one-time funding source. And it does a grave disservice to communities that will bear the disproportionate brunt of the social and economic pain associated with the future falldown in logging rates that we all know is coming. Every dollar associated with the stumpage payments on the additional 15 million cubic metres or so of timber that is now being logged in the name of salvaging pine beetle-attacked forests should go into a stand-alone account that is overseen by and for the benefit of Interior communities.

There is precedent for such funds. In the oil and gas patch of Alberta, Alaska and Norway, billions of dollars have been hived off from general revenues for purposes of creating stand-alone funds for the day when oil and natural gas reserves are depleted. In northeastern BC, moreover, the provincial government, in recognition of the expenses borne by local communities as a result of oil and gas industry activities, is returning some funds to that region to assist municipal governments in meeting those expenses.

We need to do the same for rural, forestry dependent communities. And the time to do so is now when the boom is on, because when the bust comes it will be too late.

Thank you. I look forward to hearing what people on the upcoming panel have to say and would be happy to answer questions along with them after they speak.