

*Île-du-Prince-Édouard  
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***French Language Services Act  
Annual Report  
December 14, 2013 - March 31, 2014***





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## Message from the Premier

The new *French Language Services Act* (2013) contributes to the vitality of the Acadian and Francophone community of Prince Edward Island. The legislation was developed based on extensive consultations and engagement with the Acadian and Francophone community and government institutions. It is our belief that that engagement is key in maintaining and enhancing the provision of French language services and programs for French-speaking Islanders.

According to the most recent data, just over 17,000 Islanders have French as a mother tongue or as a second language. The *French Language Services Act* demonstrates that the Government of Prince Edward Island values and is committed to providing services in French.



It is my hope that this first report on the *French Language Services Act* will serve as a historical reference document that confirms government's commitment and accountability to provide services to the Acadian and Francophone community.

Sincerely,

Robert W.J. Ghiz  
Premier of Prince Edward Island  
Minister Responsible for Acadian and Francophone Affairs

## Background

The current *French Language Services Act* has been in effect since December 14, 2013. It replaced the first *French Language Services Act*, which was partially proclaimed in April 2000. The new Act, which uses the former act as its basis, stems from a commitment by the Government of Prince Edward Island to the Acadian and Francophone community.



In 2007, the Government of Prince Edward Island committed to proclaiming the existing *French Language Services Act* in its entirety. However, in 2010, following internal and external consultations, the Government announced that a new Act would be developed. The Government then conducted an initial survey with the Acadian and Francophone community to guide the development of the legislation.



Credit: Brian Simpson

In 2011 and 2012, consultations continued with the community, the Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin, the Acadian and Francophone Community Advisory Committee and government institutions. The framework for the new Act was developed and the drafting began.

Finally, in 2013, the legislative document was completed and the bill was introduced in the Legislative Assembly on April 18 and adopted on May 8. On December 14, 2013, the new *French Language Services Act* and its *General Regulations* were proclaimed in full, in French and in English.

The new Act establishes clear obligations regarding the provision of services in French, and is based on the principle of aligning the service priorities of the Acadian and Francophone community with the Government's service capacity. The *General Regulations*, in turn, identify the government institutions that are subject to the Act, describe the designated services, and define the active offer of the designated services.

## Acadian and Francophone Community Advisory Committee

The Acadian and Francophone Community Advisory Committee was founded in 1977. Although the Committee was included in the former Act (however, under a different name), the *French Language Services Act* (2013) defines its roles and responsibilities more clearly. The Act states, among other things, that the Committee advises the Government regarding the service priorities of the Acadian and Francophone community. The Committee is also responsible for advising the Government on the designation of services, the provision of designated services in French by government institutions, and any other matter concerning the province's Acadian and Francophone community.

The Committee is made up of ten members: one member for each Francophone region (West Prince, Évangéline, Summerside-Miscouche, Rustico, Charlottetown and Eastern Kings) and four other members, including the Chair.



Pursuant to the Act, the members were officially appointed on December 14, 2013. The members of the Committee following the proclamation of the Act are as follows:

Colleen Soltermann, Chair  
Yvonne Deagle, West Prince region  
Claudette Gallant, Évangéline region  
Béatrice Caillié, Summerside region  
Tilmon Gallant, Rustico region  
Jacinthe Lemire, Charlottetown region  
Rolland Dionne, Eastern Kings region  
Andy Gallant, member at large  
Mathieu Gallant, member at large  
Selina Pellerin, member at large



Credit: Dominique Chouinard

After the *French Language Services Act* (2013) came into effect, the Acadian and Francophone Community Advisory Committee prepared an information session on the Act for Francophone community organizations. The Committee held the session twice - in the Évangéline region on March 1 and in Charlottetown on March 8. The purpose of the session was to outline the content of the Act, to present the priorities of the Acadian and Francophone community for 2014-2015, and to discuss the role that community organizations can play within the context of the Act. During the reporting period, the Committee also began developing an information session on the Act for the general public, to be able to offer it in the spring of 2014.

## French Language Services Co-ordinators

Each government institution subject to the Act is required to appoint a French language services co-ordinator. The co-ordinators perform functions set out in the Act and carry out duties assigned to them by their respective institution. Among other things, co-ordinators ensure the development of the annual plans and reports that institutions must prepare under the Act, and advise and support their institution regarding any matter related to Acadian and Francophone affairs. They are also responsible for handling complaints filed against their institution under the Act.

Together, the co-ordinators make up the Co-ordinators' Committee, which is chaired by the Acadian and Francophone Affairs Secretariat and is responsible for sharing information and assisting government institutions in meeting their obligations under the Act.

At the time of the Act's proclamation, there were French language services co-ordinators in place for all government institutions.

## Priorities of the Acadian and Francophone Community



As indicated above, the Act aims to align services provided in French with the service priorities of the Acadian and Francophone community. Surveying the community to identify its priorities is therefore very important to the implementation of the Act. This task falls to the Advisory Committee, since one of its roles under the Act is to advise the Minister on service priorities of the Acadian and Francophone community.

During the reporting period, the Committee informed government institutions of the community's priorities for the development of their plan for the 2014-2015 fiscal year. The Committee validated the results of the surveys conducted with the community in the context of the Act and informed the institutions of the priorities identified in those surveys.

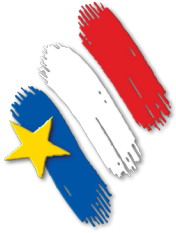
The general results of the surveys were shared with all institutions: communications and access to information in French are among the main priorities for the community. Institutions for which specific results were obtained in the surveys were informed of those results. Institutions were also made aware of priority sectors for the Acadian and Francophone community, which are as follows: health and wellness, public safety, social services, tourism and culture, rural development, and innovation and advanced learning.

## Government Capacity

The capacity of government institutions to offer services in French depends primarily on their bilingual workforce. The Public Service Commission is responsible for identifying, within the public service and Health PEI, designated bilingual positions and bilingual employees who are not in designated bilingual positions. The following are the figures as of March 31, 2014:

<b>Designated bilingual positions</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Bilingual employees not in a designated bilingual position<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>221</b>

<sup>1</sup> Bilingual employees are employees whose oral French-language skills have been assessed by the Public Service Commission and who have achieved at least the Intermediate + level.



## French Language Services

The *French Language Services Act* defines the obligations of government institutions regarding written correspondence, public consultations and the provision of designated services.

Regarding written correspondence and public consultations, the Act states that government institutions must respond in French, in writing, to correspondence received in French, and that the public must be provided with an opportunity to participate in French in public consultations.

For designated services, the Act states that government institutions must provide designated services to any member of the public in the person's choice of French or English at all times, and ensure a comparable quality in both languages. Institutions are also required to make an active offer of those services. The list of designated services is found in the *General Regulations* of the Act.

During the reporting period, there were three designated services:

Designated Service	Government Institution
Services offered in person at the Abram-Village Public Library, the Dr. J.-Edmond-Arsenault Public Library (Charlottetown), and the J.-Henri-Blanchard Public Library (Summerside)	Department of Tourism and Culture
Provision by telephone and online of the Traveller Information Service (511)	Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal
Traffic signs, with the exception of stop signs and electronic variable message signs	

It is also important to note that, in addition to the three designated services, Government provides several other services in French; however, the obligations under the Act do not apply to those services. A list of services provided in French by Government is available on the website of the Acadian and Francophone Affairs Secretariat ([www.ipervicesfrançais.ca](http://www.ipervicesfrançais.ca)).



Credit: Brian Simpson

## Accountability Framework

Among the accountability measures set forth in the Act are the complaints mechanism, annual plans and reports by government institutions, and the annual report by the Minister responsible for Acadian and Francophone Affairs.



### ***Complaints Mechanism***

The complaints mechanism allows members of the public to make a complaint when a government institution does not comply with its obligations regarding designated services, written correspondence in French or public consultations. The complaints mechanism includes two levels. French Language Services Co-ordinators inquire into complaints at the first level, and a complaints officer at the second level.

Pursuant to the Act, Jean-Paul Arsenault was appointed the Complaints Officer on December 14, 2013. The Complaints Officer has a five-year mandate.

During the reporting period, no government institutions received a complaint under the Act.

### ***Annual Plans and Reports***

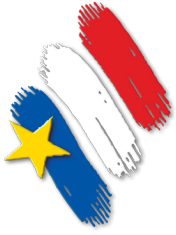
The Act states that government institutions must prepare annual plans and reports. In their annual plan, institutions must provide information on:

- the service priorities of the Acadian and Francophone community in relation to the services they provide;
- their service capacity to provide services in French;
- their provision of designated services in French;
- complaints received regarding their compliance with the Act.

### ***Minister's Annual Report***

The Act also states that the Minister responsible for Acadian and Francophone Affairs must prepare an annual report on the activities of the Acadian and Francophone Affairs Secretariat and of government institutions, and lay that report before the Legislative Assembly.





## Activities of the Acadian and Francophone Affairs Secretariat

The role of the Acadian and Francophone Affairs Secretariat is to advise and support the Government on all matters related to the Acadian and Francophone community.

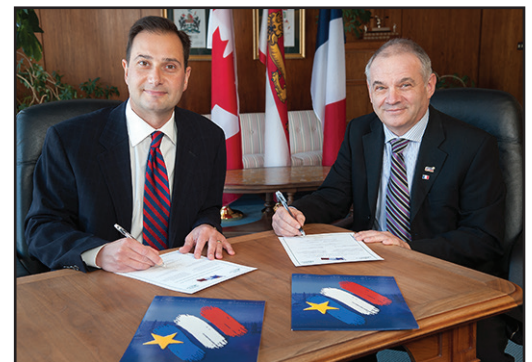
The Secretariat is also responsible for developing and co-ordinating the implementation of government policies and programs related to Acadian and Francophone affairs and the provision of designated services in French. The Secretariat is also charged with the administration of the Act and its Regulations.

During the reporting period, the Secretariat supported the implementation of the Act in various ways. For example, it provided several documents to government institutions, including tools to support co-ordinators with the complaint process. The Secretariat also advised institutions regarding the interpretation of the Act and held several activities aimed at raising awareness of the Act among government institutions.

Furthermore, the Secretariat supported government institutions in the development of the annual plan that each institution must submit under the Act, by providing them with an annual plan template to guide them, and by sharing relevant information, such as information regarding their bilingual workforce.

Following the proclamation of the Act, the Secretariat published tools on its website ([www.ipervicesfrançais.ca](http://www.ipervicesfrançais.ca)) to assist the public in using the complaints mechanism, including a frequently asked questions document, a snapshot of the complaint process, and a complaint form.

During the reference period, the Secretariat also continued its work with the Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin as part of a working group, the purpose of which is to ensure open and ongoing communication between the government and the spokesgroup of the Acadian and Francophone community regarding the implementation of the Act.



Credit: Brian Simpson

## Activities of Government Institutions

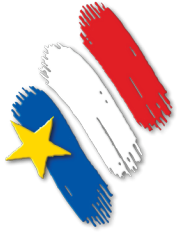
The 20 government institutions subject to the *French Language Services Act* are identified in the *General Regulations*. They are:



- Department of Agriculture and Forestry
- Department of Community Services and Seniors
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- Department of Environment, Labour and Justice
- Department of Finance, Energy and Municipal Affairs
- Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development
- Department of Health and Wellness
- Department of Innovation and Advanced Learning
- Department of Tourism and Culture
- Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal
- Executive Council Office
- Health PEI
- Innovation PEI
- Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission
- Island Waste Management Corporation
- Prince Edward Island Human Rights Commission
- Prince Edward Island Liquor Control Commission
- Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation
- Prince Edward Island Public Service Commission
- Workers Compensation Board of Prince Edward Island

During the reporting period, government institutions were required to prepare an annual plan for the 2014-2015 fiscal year based on the priorities of the community and submit it to the Minister responsible for Acadian and Francophone Affairs. In their plan, institutions provided information regarding their provision of services in French, including:

- their communications in French and the information they provide in French, as well as initiatives that they plan to carry out in this regard during the 2014-2015 fiscal year;
- programs and services that they provide in French, as well as what they plan to do in terms of providing French language services during the 2014-2015 fiscal year.



## Next Steps

As shown in this report, the implementation of the *French Language Services Act* depends on a number of stakeholders. Throughout the 2014-2015 fiscal year, the Acadian and Francophone Affairs Secretariat will continue its co-ordination work by supporting government institutions and the Acadian and Francophone Community Advisory Committee. Government institutions will be implementing their first annual plans and will need to submit their first annual reports in accordance with the Act. The Advisory Committee must again identify the service priorities of the Acadian and Francophone community in order to share them with government institutions, and will continue its work to advance the provision of services in French within the provincial government.



Credit: Communications PEI