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Chair: Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia



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• (1125)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): We have three witnesses today. Two are online, and one is with us.

I would like to mention that everyone who's online, whether they be members of the committee or witnesses, has passed the sound check, so all is good there.

We have with us Bryan Gilvesy, from ALUS. With us in person is Mr. Ralph Pentland. We have, also online, Ms. Zita Botelho, from Watersheds BC.

We'll start with—

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Chair, could you update everybody on where the minister is today?

The Chair: I don't know where he is. I'm assuming that he's on his way to Dubai. That's what I assume.

Mr. Dan Mazier: We asked for him to be here. Obviously, he's not listening in today.

The Chair: Yes, but he has confirmed that he can come.

I'll bring this up when we do future business.

We'll start with Mr. Gilvesy.

You have five minutes, please, for an opening statement. The floor is yours.

Mr. Bryan Gilvesy (Chief Executive Officer, ALUS): Good morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me to speak today.

I'm a farmer and a rancher in Norfolk County, Ontario, as well as the CEO of the only farmer-led, community-based charitable organization in Canada delivering nature-based solutions. ALUS has been implementing one of the most effective and scalable solutions to water quality protection for nearly two decades. We build and restore natural infrastructure, or natural systems, on marginal or un-economic farmland to provide solutions. I come to you today bringing an agricultural solution to Canada's freshwater priorities.

The agricultural sector both relies on and affects freshwater resources in Canada. The decline in Canada's inventory of natural assets such as wetlands and forests has removed critical infrastructure that helps protect water quality from activities that affect freshwater

systems. Without sufficient natural infrastructure, we see impacts on water quality. Soil erosion and sedimentation can harm aquatic plants and wildlife and create an environment favourable to the development of algae blooms and pathogens. Runoff of nutrients, pesticides, organic matter and pathogens threatens aquatic life, drinking water systems and our food supply.

Natural infrastructure built by farmers and ranchers on their working landscape reduces nutrients from entering freshwater systems, thereby preventing harmful algae blooms. It reduces soil erosion and sedimentation of waterways. It slows water flow and increases absorption of water to reduce flood risk, and it supports groundwater recharge for increased water security for both upstream and downstream communities.

Wetlands restored by farmers help manage rising watercourse levels by slowing water flows and support groundwater recharge by capturing and absorbing excess water. They also protect food security by reducing the effects of severe weather as well as enhancing wildlife habitat to support birds, pollinators and other beneficial insects and insectivores.

ALUS knows the solution is at the grassroots level because it has supported over 1,600 Canadian farmers and ranchers in building nature-based solutions that enhance natural infrastructure on their lands to protect water quality and quantity, including restoring and/or creating tens of thousands of acres of wetland habitat. Our network is driven by 40 community partners that provide the grassroots leadership our program demands. We now operate in six provinces.

ALUS has quantified freshwater benefits produced by our projects in four Ontario watersheds and has proven that ALUS projects deliver positive results for water quality. With support from RBC Tech for Nature, ALUS modelled water-based outcomes across four watersheds within the Lake Erie basin in Ontario. The project demonstrated the effectiveness of nature-based projects on ALUS farms in reducing nutrients entering watercourses that feed into Lake Erie, with the largest benefits coming from restored or created wetlands.

We've demonstrated how the agricultural community can deliver effective solutions to freshwater quality concerns across the country. ALUS and its network of farmers are standing ready to scale their efforts and deliver measurable water quality outcomes through nature-based solutions on marginal farmlands for the benefit of all Canadians.

Thank you.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gilvesy.

We'll go now to Mr. Pentland for up to five minutes.

Mr. Ralph Pentland (Member, Forum for Leadership on Water): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to thank the committee for undertaking this study and also for the opportunity to meet with you today.

I'm just going to start with a few words about a seven-page submission that you received from the Forum for Leadership on Water—or FLOW—a little while ago.

FLOW is made up of about a dozen volunteers from across Canada who have been collaborating on water policy analysis and advice for over 15 years.

My own background in the water field goes back over 60 years. That's 30 years in the federal government and 30 years in a combination of consulting and volunteering in Canada and in about half a dozen other countries. Over those 60 years, I have observed a lot of major changes both in water issues and in the conventional wisdom about how we should deal with them.

When I first started working in the field, the sole emphasis was on economic development. Around 1970, we had the water pollution crisis and we added an environmental component. By the time the federal water policy was issued in 1987, we were trying to reconcile economic and environmental values through sustainable development concepts. Those three phases are all still work in progress. We're now in the early stages of introducing a variety of rights into the equation. At the same time, we're trying to cope with the very serious implications of a changing climate.

The FLOW submission takes both the evolving issues and the evolving conventional wisdom into account and suggests 15 priority areas that we believe are ripe for significant progress in the coming years. The criteria for setting these priorities are that, first, there is an issue of national significance, and, second, that there is potential to do something about it in the coming years.

As short-term priorities—say, over the next five years—we speak to the Canada water agency, collaboration, Canada-U.S. waters, indigenous drinking water, flood damage reduction, climate change adaptation, water prediction, river basin priorities, water data and water research.

As medium-term priorities—say, over the next 10 years—we speak to legislative renewal, chemicals management, water apportionment and principles for the watershed approach.

Finally, as a long-term priority—say, beyond 10 years and I don't know how far into the future—we foresee evolving social justice

principles being incorporated more fulsomely into water management decisions.

I think I'll just leave it at that. I welcome any questions that committee members may have on our submission or on any other topic that you may wish to raise with me.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pentland.

Now it's Ms. Botelho's turn.

Ms. Zita Botelho (Director, Watersheds BC): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

[*English*]

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you as part of this important study on fresh water.

My name is Zita Botelho, and I am the director of Watersheds BC. I'm calling in from the unceded territories of the Songhees and Esquimalt nations.

Since 2021, Watersheds BC has been working in partnership with two philanthropic organizations to help deliver \$42 million of B.C. provincial funding that has supported 110 watershed security-related projects across B.C.

I need to start by identifying a problem. Over the last 15 years, the federal government has been weakly engaged in freshwater issues in B.C. Recognizing the diversity of freshwater challenges across the country, B.C. continues to see little federal engagement relative to other regions.

Today, I'm here to talk to you about a win-win-win opportunity for the federal government. The conditions in B.C. are both urgent and optimal for the federal government to actively collaborate with the Province of B.C., the NGO community and first nations.

I will speak to four conditions that offer an opportunity for the federal government to demonstrate leadership that will yield substantial economic benefits, drive employment transitions, uplift rural and remote communities, advance UNDRIP implementation and, importantly, address the escalating costs of climate impacts.

First, the B.C. government has put skin in the game. Since 2021, it has invested \$57 million in funding watershed security projects. In March 2022, the B.C. government committed an additional \$100 million to establish an endowment for a watershed security fund. This fund is being co-developed with the first nations water caucus to create a governance and implementation framework for a long-term sustainable fund.

B.C. has seen the benefits of its investments, and this is an immediate opportunity for the federal government to invest \$400 million over four years to match B.C.'s initial investment. These B.C. investments have primed the pumps and cleared the pathway for delivering impact and results.

Second, let's delve into the economic potential that investing in watershed security can unlock. There's a prime opportunity to create jobs and employment transitions. The Healthy Watersheds Initiative's major outcomes report shared that \$20 million in funding resulted in 1,273 direct jobs across B.C.

More recently, through the Indigenous Watersheds Initiative, 103 jobs are being supported by 14 projects, with 62% of jobs being held by community members. We estimate that IWI will support approximately 245 jobs, with many in remote and rural indigenous communities. These investments are supporting jobs that focus on monitoring and assessment, indigenous knowledge and land-based learning, planning and governance, fisheries and food sovereignty, restoration and protection.

Third, let's consider the pressing issue of climate impacts and the costs associated with them. You likely need no reminder of the devastating atmospheric river that hit B.C. in October 2021, or the record wildfire and droughts of 2023. The cost of the 2021 floods was \$9 billion. Yesterday, B.C.'s finance minister reported that the cost of this year's wildfire budget is \$987 million, and that figure doesn't include the costs to individuals, businesses and communities. The wildfire burned scars that criss-crossed this province, creating increased risks of flood, mud and landslides. This year's historic widespread drought is predicted to result in a billion dollars' worth of economic losses.

Investing in watershed security is a proactive step toward climate resilience, which not only safeguards our communities, but also saves money in the long run. Look no further than the successful projects funded by the Healthy Watersheds Initiative. These projects, whether addressing wildfires, floods or restoring wetlands, showcase the tangible benefits of investing in watershed health. We witnessed their successes in real time during the floods. This isn't just about crisis management; it's about long-term planning that ensures the safety and well-being of citizens.

Fourth, investing in watershed security helps to advance the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Through the work of HWI, we have seen how this investment supported articles 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 36 and 39. The investment enables first nations to focus on their priorities, and they have shown their leadership through this work.

As I hope I have made clear, conditions in B.C. are ripe for collaboration and well positioned to deliver positive impacts and outcomes. I recommend that the federal government invest \$400 million in the watershed security fund.

I commend this committee for studying such a crucial matter. By prioritizing and making these investments, we can build resilience in our communities and proactively respond to disasters before they happen.

I look forward to continuing this conversation with you and answering any questions you may have.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Botelho.

We'll now open the floor to questions, and Mr. Leslie will start the first round. Each speaker will have six minutes to ask the witnesses questions.

Mr. Leslie, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start with Mr. Gilvesy.

I appreciate your testimony this morning. I think it's important that you were able to offer a bit of a unique perspective as both a farmer and a leader within an organization working with farmers to deliver ecological goods and services to Canadians.

I think that's important specifically due to the fact that we need to sustainably intensify the production of our best farmland. We need to feed both Canadians and a growing hungry population around the world. By maximizing production on our best farmland, we can allow other aspects of the farm to be used for the benefits we can derive from a natural environment. We need to do a good job of recognizing that it's "whole of farm". It's not just the field level. You talked about some of the riparian areas along the bush lines that are maintained, and the trees planted by farmers. Again, these are the ecological goods and services delivered for the public good, which often come at a cost to farmers and landowners.

First, I'd like to ask you this: How does Canada fare in comparison to other countries and some of our international trading partners in terms of support for farmers and landowners already willing to invest and take the right actions to deliver solutions for our environment?

• (1140)

Mr. Bryan Gilvesy: We've had some direct experience in the United States. We're opening ALUS in Iowa and Ohio, so I'll compare it directly to the experience there.

The infrastructure bill the Biden government introduced has provided not only fresh capital—lots of capital—but also fresh thinking about the value of nature-based solutions for the planet and the people. I don't think we're there yet, in Canada. We've heard much about the efficacy of that program in the States. I don't believe we have overriding, objective support with that kind of money in Canada yet. I'd have to say that, at this point in time, while the thought is there, and while programs like ours exist and are primed and ready to go, the dollar commitment isn't there yet.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you.

I think that's a great point you've raised, because farmers ultimately need to be paid for a public good they are providing on their private land. I appreciate that you mentioned the costs and capital associated with this.

One of the important challenges we see facing farmers right now is an increasing debt load and increasing taxes, particularly the carbon tax and the impact that has. It's removing capital from their ability to make practice changes, enhance wetlands and take meaningful action on the ground.

I'd like you to expand on what impact the reduction in capital available to farmers through the carbon tax and other taxation and policy decisions has in terms of their ability to deliver these ecological goods and services.

Mr. Bryan Gilvesy: I'd like to answer that question by pointing out the opportunity.

What we see and what we've learned from the farm participants and leaders who deliver our program across the country is that they see their farms somewhat differently. The farm is capable of producing food, fibre, energy and ecosystem services all at the same time. We don't see that clearly from a policy perspective—that all of these things can occur at the same time. I think that's the opportunity.

There's another lens to bring to bear on this. These ecosystem services we're producing on our farms relate to a marketplace that is increasingly growing and determining that there's real value in producing these things for society. That marketplace is increasingly being supported by several of the corporations that support our program, such as Danone, Molson Coors, Cargill, General Mills and RBC.

I sense it's much more of an opportunity that we can harness: viewing a farm as much more than it ever was before.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I'll quickly go back to the international comparison with the United States.

I know they have the conservation reserve program, which is widely used down there. It is largely based on prevailing land rental rates. As we have an expansion in the size of equipment, there are more and more areas of marginal land that simply don't make sense for farmers to work with.

Would you be in support of a program like that, one that provides a meaningful commitment, financially, to farmers, so they can try to remove some of that marginal land, or towards wetland enhancement or creation? Is that a model we should be following?

Mr. Bryan Gilvesy: I'll be quite clear. ALUS is inspired by the conservation reserve program, with one particular twist: The farmers themselves, at the community level—they know their lands, communities and priorities best—deliver the program. It's interesting how, for both individual farmers and groups at the community level, the definition of “marginal farmland” has shifted. Yes, we're allowing farmers to declare what's marginal. We're not dictating this, but the size of equipment.... Highly erodible points and areas close to bush lots are marginal by definition, because they're uneconomic to farm with the cost pressures—

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you.

I'd like to cede my remaining time to Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move the following motion.

First of all, Mr. Pentland, this will only take two or three minutes here. This is a simple motion.

That given the statement made by Mr. Derek Hermanutz, Director General, Economic Analysis Directorate, for Environment and Climate Change Canada on November 9, 2023, at the Standing Committee of Environment and Sustainable Development of:

“I think we're probably in a world where we could say with some rough analysis that up to one-third, potentially, of the emissions reductions that we are projecting to 2030 would come from carbon pricing”;

And given that Canada's Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development has stated in their 2023 Fall Reports that:

“The federal government is not on track to meet the 2030 target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions”;

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee order the production of Environment and Climate Change Canada's complete analysis including all economic modelling, referred to by Mr. Derek Hermanutz, of the government's emissions reduction projections specifically from the carbon tax, no later than December 8, 2023.

Mr. Chair, the Liberals keep telling us that Canadians need to pay a carbon tax to reduce emissions; however, no one in the government has been able to say exactly how much emissions are being reduced from the carbon tax. No wonder the environment commissioner has revealed that the Liberals are failing to meet their own emissions targets.

If the Liberals are forcing Canadians to pay a costly carbon tax in the name of emissions reductions, Canadians deserve to know exactly how much emissions are being reduced by this carbon tax. It's a very simple ask for Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1145)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate Mr. Mazier's interest in carbon pricing.

I note that it's not just the Liberals suggesting that carbon pricing is the foundation for any serious emissions reduction strategy. It was also the Conservatives in the last federal election—with the exception of Mr. Leslie, I might add, because he won a by-election and probably wasn't even allowed to say “climate change” in his campaign, but it does exist. We are here to fight climate change and determine how we might do that together, collectively.

It's a good thing, because yesterday we published ECCC's analysis on how carbon pricing is reducing our emissions. It is indeed responsible for up to one-third. It's challenging, as any economic modelling is, to come to a precise number, but the commissioner and the gentleman from ECCC at the meeting indicated that it was up to one-third.

That modelling and that economic analysis are now available on ECCC's website. I will forward it to every member of the committee. I don't think it's necessary to formally table it or request it from the government, given that it's on the website.

I would move to adjourn debate on this and return to the study.

The Chair: Can we have a vote on adjourning debate?

(Motion negatived: 6 nays; 5 yeas)

The Chair: The debate continues.

[*Translation*]

We will continue to discuss the motion.

For the record, I've been generous so far with the MPs who table motions while we have witnesses. I allowed the person to use the rest of their speaking time after the motion had been adopted or rejected, but I'm told that things are done differently in the House. Once you table a motion, you lose the rest of your speaking time. From now on, the mover of the motion, regardless of party, will lose the rest of their speaking time; it has to be fair to everyone.

There's a vote in the House today. I therefore ask the members of the committee if they give me permission to continue the meeting until five minutes before the vote. I assume everyone will stay here to vote online.

I seem to have the committee's agreement on this.

The next speaker is Mr. Bachrach.

● (1150)

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I share your desire to move through these motions efficiently. I think if each party at the table has a chance to offer its thoughts, then we could move to a vote and get back to the witness testimony, which I agree is very important.

I, too, keyed in on the statement from the official at our previous meeting that the carbon pricing regime in Canada is responsible for about a third of emissions reduction. I think better understanding the numbers behind that statement would be useful.

I take Mr. van Koeverden's point that the modelling is now available on the website. I haven't looked at it yet. If that is indeed the case, then this motion is going to be quite easy for the department to fulfill by providing the committee with that modelling.

I would just add that—and I appreciate Mr. Mazier's opening comments—it does seem from the tone of his comments that he wants to see Canada meet its emissions reduction targets. I think the best way to underscore the sincerity of those comments is to put forward effective, credible and evidence-based policies that would allow Canada to meet the targets.

What we hear continually is criticism of one policy and, frankly, I agree that the policy has major drawbacks when it comes to its effectiveness in driving down emissions. However, what we don't hear from the Conservative Party is any viable alternative. We don't see the alternative policies being brought forward for scrutiny, and I think that's very important.

I'll end my remarks there, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to go to a vote on this motion and to support it.

The Chair: Okay, we'll go now to Madame Pauzé.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): The Bloc Québécois also finds the motion very interesting. Although it seems to be accessible on the site, we are ready to vote in favour of this motion.

I'd like to propose two small amendments. In the last paragraph, it says: “Pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee order [...]” Since we want to be more diplomatic, we propose replacing the word “order” with “request” or “call for”.

As for the date, we propose December 13, 2023, instead of December 8, 2023.

The Chair: Mr. Mazier, do you agree?

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Sure.

The Chair: We're not going to order; we're going to request.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Yes.

The Chair: Madame Chatel, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One of the important elements we need to study are developments in Europe concerning carbon price adjustments on imported products.

Other countries are also implementing carbon pricing—Canada is not alone. Countries without carbon pricing will be charged for importing their goods. Europe is proving to be a leader, as is California.

The Chair: One moment, Mrs. Chatel, there is a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: I don't know what the relevance is. We're just asking for a report. She's talking about carbon tax on imports. I don't know what that has to do with it.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We're talking about carbon pricing.

Carry on, Mrs. Chatel.

Ms. Sophie Chatel: I propose we have a report on this because it's closely tied to the future. Unfortunately for the Conservatives, without carbon pricing, we will no longer be competitive internationally.

• (1155)

The Chair: Are you proposing an amendment?

Ms. Sophie Chatel: I'm proposing an amendment so that we can also study carbon pricing adjustments at other countries' borders. This would be very important for the Canadian economy.

The Chair: The amendment is in order.

[*English*]

It's pushing the envelope, but I rule that it's receivable.

[*Translation*]

Do you have the exact wording, Mrs. Chatel?

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Chair, I have a point of order.

Just so the witnesses know, this is totally not planned at all. This should have been two minutes and done. Now we're going to turn it into 20 minutes.

It's just so the witnesses know.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I hope it's not a point of debate.

Go ahead.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: We're currently dealing with a motion from the Conservatives. It was their decision to bring it forward.

Mr. Dan Mazier: It's an amendment.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: You didn't have to bring the motion forward.

The Chair: We're not going to argue that point.

I would like to see Madame Chatel's amendment in writing.

With the vote coming and with debates on the motion, I think we may have to have the witnesses back.

Would that be all right with you, Mr. Pentland?

Mr. Ralph Pentland: I can come back any time.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Pentland would be fine with coming back.

If we could find a mutually convenient date, would the witnesses online be available to come back to answer questions to finish off this segment of the agenda today?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Zita Botelho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Bryan Gilvesy: Yes, of course.

The Chair: Okay. Perfect.

I'm going to excuse the witnesses at this point. Hopefully we can get through this quickly, so that we can have our second panel.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I don't want to prolong all this, but if I contest your decision to rule this motion in order...

The Chair: Excuse me for a moment.

I just want to reiterate to the witnesses that their testimony is finished for today, and that we'll be inviting them back at a later date that works for everyone.

Mr. Pentland, Mr. Gilvesy and Ms. Botelho, it was very interesting, and we want to continue to ask you questions so that we can benefit from your expertise. Thank you very much.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: It's a dilatory motion, I've just been told.

I'm tabling this motion so that we can get on with the debate right away.

The Chair: So you don't agree with the fact that I found...

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I don't agree with your decision to rule it in order.

In fact, Mrs. Chatel's motion opens up a whole new debate. It's not that it's not interesting, on the contrary, but we have a motion before us. I think we could proceed quickly.

• (1200)

The Chair: Ms. Pauzé objects to the chair's decision to rule the amendment in order. This is a motion without debate. We shall now proceed to the vote.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: On a point of order, the interpretation said that the ruling of the chair was that the amendment was out of order. I heard you say that the amendment was in order.

The Chair: It was in order.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Well, the interpretation just said the ruling was that the amendment was out of order. Maybe we can just clarify.

The Chair: No, I ruled it in order.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: That's what I heard too.

Mr. Dan Mazier: The challenge to the chair is that it is out of order.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mrs. Chatel, I'd like to ask you for clarification. I want to make sure I understand.

You're not asking for a study. You're asking for information on adjustments. You're not asking the department to provide an exhaustive analysis. It's more of an inquiry, correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I just want to clarify that, Mr. Deltell.

Is that it, Mrs. Chatel?

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Yes, that's right.

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you have the floor on a point of order.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, what is the exact wording of the motion?

The Chair: I'm getting there.

We'll soon get back to Ms. Pauzé, who expresses her disagreement with my decision.

Mrs. Chatel, could you please read the wording of your amendment to Mr. Mazier's motion so that we can fully understand?

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: It would simply be a matter of adding the fact that since representatives from Environment and Climate Change Canada will be with us to present the analyses, they could also give us an update on the status of border carbon adjustments during these presentations.

The Chair: Perhaps I misunderstood the original motion.

Mr. Mazier, you're not asking for the department to appear. It's about providing information.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: It's just for a report.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: All right. We do not request that departmental representatives appear before the committee.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I may have misunderstood, but it's about adding an update.

The Chair: You want an update on adjustments.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: This is the aspect that concerns me most because it will come into force on January 1, 2024. I'd like an update from the department.

The Chair: So we are adding a request.

Ms. Pauzé, we will now proceed to the vote on your objection.

If you vote in favour of this objection, you agree with Ms. Pauzé that Mrs. Chatel's amendment is out of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: The question is, shall the chair's ruling be sustained?

The Chair: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: If you vote yes, it means—

The Chair: It means you're sustaining the chair. That's right, yes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Making the question clear is super important.

The Chair: Okay, if you vote.... Maybe you could express this better than I can.

Madame Pauzé is challenging the chair. If members vote yes, are they voting for Madame Pauzé's challenge or are they voting to sustain the chair?

• (1205)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Natalie Jeanneault): It's the opposite of what is normally—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: The question is, shall the chair's ruling be sustained? If you vote yes, you're sustaining the chair. If you vote no, you're supporting the challenge.

Just be very clear what the question is. It has nothing to do with Madame Pauzé. It has nothing to do with Madame Chatel. It has to do with you, the chair.

The Chair: If you're voting yes, you're voting for the chair. If you're voting no—

Mr. Dan Mazier: It's on the decision that this is in order. The whole thing is about—

The Chair: It's about whether it's in order, so if you're voting yes, you're saying that it's in order. If you're voting no, you're saying it's not in order and you're disagreeing with the chair.

[*Translation*]

Does everyone understand?

If you vote yes, it means you agree with the chair's decision. The amendment is therefore in order. If you vote no, it's the opposite.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: The amendment is therefore out of order.

We will continue to debate the motion.

Mrs. Chatel, you have proposed an amendment, so we'll have to give the floor to another member of the committee.

Mr. van Koeverden, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: This is Mr. Mazier's motion.

[English]

It's on your motion with the friendly amendment that you accepted.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Okay. Let's call the vote. I'm done.

The Chair: Mr. Leslie, you're next. You can call for the vote if you want.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be brief. I didn't have a chance.... I haven't read through it in detail. I appreciate your bringing to our attention that there is a document on the website now.

I think there's an important distinction in the motion itself that calls for all the documents and modelling related to this, so while there might be an online version of one set of data, I suspect the environment department has done numerous types of modelling and has probably collected it into this document it put on its website, which states that everything is fine. I think it's worth asking the department to provide all the documentation, as per the motion.

With that, I will call for a vote.

The Chair: Okay. Let's vote on Mr. Mazier's motion.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

• (1230)

[Translation]

The Chair: After all that, we have arrived at a unanimous decision.

It's now time to vote in the House. So I'm going to suspend the meeting. We'll resume the session as soon as we've voted.

• (1230)

(Pause)

• (1230)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order. We have permission to continue until 1:30 p.m., so I'd like us to start right away, so that we have a full hour with the second witness panel.

I would like to welcome Professors Beisner and Orihel, who will be testifying as individuals.

We also welcome Ms. Wanda McFadyen, Executive Director of the Assiniboine River Basin Initiative.

Finally, Mr. Marc Hudon, from the Forum for Leadership on Water, also joins us.

Ms. Beisner, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Beatrix Beisner (Professor and Researcher, Université du Québec à Montréal, As an Individual): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for your invitation.

Today, I'd like to share a few scientific principles on how freshwater ecosystems work and, in particular, why it's important to adopt a watershed-based approach.

Freshwaters are by nature connected ecosystems with directionality in their fluxes and flows. The watershed of a waterbody is more simply defined as the entire land area drained by a body of water, including groundwater aquifers.

All activity within a watershed that can influence the quality of water that flows as precipitation, irrigation or groundwater will influence the associated waterbodies.

While we still have a lot to learn scientifically about all the significant connections, we know with certainty that human activity in watersheds influences their aquatic ecosystems, and that there is directionality of flows through watersheds. Thus, disturbances can influence aquatic ecosystems even if the effects occur far away, although attention is often focused on uses near waterbodies.

Unfortunately, watershed boundaries, defined by the landscape's topography, rarely overlap with political boundaries. Our cities and farming, mining and forestry activities often overlap more than one watershed, or unduly occupy a large proportion of a given watershed.

Recent work we have conducted as part of the NSERC Lake Pulse Network, which sampled over 650 lakes across Canada, has shown that even urbanization levels of less than 5% in a watershed can lead to changes in the organisms present in a lake, potentially influencing ecosystem functioning. Thus, aquatic ecosystem structure and function are partially driven by what happens in the watershed, and not only by internal functioning within the waterbody itself. We call these "allochthonous influences" on a waterbody; these will complement, and in some cases even overwhelm, the internal "autochthonous" interactions within a waterbody.

Given the effects of climate change, such as the forest fires and increasingly intense storm events we witnessed in Canada this past summer, the influence of allochthonous inputs from the terrestrial portions of watersheds will increase, potentially overwhelming the internal functioning of many of our aquatic ecosystems.

The first message to take away is that activity in the terrestrial part of a watershed influences the structure and functioning of its waterbodies. The second message is that political boundaries and watershed boundaries do not necessarily overlap.

I would now like to turn to why it's so important to consider the natural boundaries of watersheds in conservation.

I've mentioned the flows from terrestrial to aquatic ecosystems, but there is also the fact that there is a connectivity between the waterbodies that make up watersheds. It is critical to consider connectivity for several reasons.

Firstly, these aquatic connections serve as migratory corridors for many organisms. In addition, with climate change and the warming of Canada's waters, aquatic organisms will need corridors within watersheds to move northward to cooler waters.

These migratory pathways also aid exotic species invasions that are challenging many ecosystems across Canada. In managing the effects of these species, we will also need to adopt a watershed-based approach and not focus solely on a single invaded river or lake, for example.

Water contamination by pesticides, other toxins, microplastics and nutrients must also be managed, in a watershed context, because of their connectivity.

Furthermore, damming flowing waters is an obvious barrier to natural connectivity, as are bridge and culvert installations. Such activities are related to human needs, such as transportation, water level management for agriculture and drinking water, and hydroelectricity generation. So, politically speaking, several departments at all levels of government are involved in watershed disturbances, and therefore in their mitigation.

For all these reasons, my third message is that internal flows within watersheds need to be considered when managing contamination, invasive species, migration and climate change mitigation for aquatic life.

Finally, many different types of human activity can influence watershed connectivity and, politically, different agencies need to be involved in their protection and management.

Overall, based on scientific limnological knowledge, the committee is advised to support structuring, collaborative and scientific initiatives at the watershed level for their better protection and conservation.

• (1235)

Thank you for your attention. I'd also like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Beisner.

Ms. Orihel, you have the floor.

[English]

Dr. Diane Orihel (Associate Professor in Aquatic Ecotoxicology, Queen's University, As an Individual): Good afternoon. Thank you kindly for inviting me back to Ottawa to speak today.

I applaud the members for studying the role of the federal government in protecting and managing Canada's fresh water. As a water-rich nation, Canada has a disproportionately large responsibility on the world stage to be a good steward of water, and the federal government must rightly provide the leadership to do so.

As an aquatic ecotoxicologist, I have devoted the last 25 years to the study of fresh water in Canada, with a focus on understanding aquatic pollutants, including nutrients, mercury, flame retardants, microplastics, oil spills and oil sands contaminants.

Today, I will speak to the issue of fresh water in Canada's oil sands, but before I do, I wish to correct some misconceptions about

water I heard in earlier meetings, particularly in reference to the Canada water agency.

First, while it's true that water accumulates in water bodies such as lakes and rivers, in reality water is much more than that. Water is dynamic and exists in many forms and in many places. Water is frozen in glaciers, exists as a gas in the atmosphere, flows underground in spaces between soil particles and exists within our own bodies. Water can be and is contaminated at any and all of these stages. My message here is that if we are to truly protect and manage Canada's water, we must do so throughout its entire hydrologic cycle.

Second, while it's true that water is a resource, again, in reality water is so much more than that. Water is life. Water is a habitat for fish and wildlife. Water, for many indigenous peoples, is a living entity with a spirit—not a resource, but a relative. My message here is to centre reconciliation and indigenous ways of knowing in an effort to redefine our relationship with water.

Now I'll go to the broad policy failure in Canada's oil sands.

This committee has been studying a recent incident of a toxic leak from Imperial Oil's Kearl oil sands mine. Much of the conversation has focused on the communication failures. Certainly, there were grievous errors in communication, but these dwarf the much more profound failure in water management and policy.

Let me elaborate. Currently, 1.4 trillion litres of Canada's water are held by the oil sands industry in tailings ponds. This water has been taken from the Athabasca River and then used numerous times for industrial processes to extract bitumen from oil sands. While reusing water multiple times for bitumen extraction has reduced the volume of water extracted from the river, it has also created a serious problem. It has concentrated salts, metals and naphthenic acids in these waters, making them toxic to fish, amphibians, birds and mammals. I would be happy to submit a brief to that effect.

This highly toxic water is then stored in rudimentary earthen pits that were never constructed to be anything more than temporary settling ponds. As a result, the tailings ponds are a massive liability. I hope the Kearl incident wakes us to this ticking time bomb.

There is a solution. The industry must be required to treat and release its waste water—not at the end of the mine's life and not after the industry goes bankrupt and taxpayers are on the hook, but by the industry, in real time, during mine operation. It's 2023, not 1967. We can do this, and we have done this for other types of waste.

Here are two examples.

Think of domestic waste. In cities, we don't defecate in latrines in our backyards anymore. Sewage is centralized, treated with primary, secondary and even tertiary treatment processes, and then released to the environment. The waste-water systems effluent regulations were developed under the Fisheries Act, and the Government of Canada is responsible for managing the risk posed by substances listed under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

Think of the pulp and paper industry. The federal pulp and paper effluent regulations were developed under the Fisheries Act in the 1990s to manage documented threats to fish, fish habitat and human health. When mills implemented treatment processes to remove suspended solids and break down organic matter, the quality of effluent increased dramatically, and downstream ecosystems, including fish habitats, are now better protected.

My message here is that a policy whereby the oil sands industry is required to clean up its industrial waste water in real time as the wastes are produced is the best way forward. I assert emphatically that it's much better to plan for intentional discharges of treated water regulated and monitored by provincial and federal bodies than to have a tailings pond fail and result in an accidental spill of highly toxic waste water to the Athabasca River and the communities living downstream, including indigenous peoples. Such a catastrophe is nothing short of national tragedy and an international shame.

In closing, I recommend that, one, the Government of Canada embrace a holistic and respectful definition of water and re-envision its relationship with water through the lens of reconciliation with indigenous peoples. Two, I emphasize the tremendous need for the federal government to take action and require Canada's oil sands industry to deal—not tomorrow but today—with the enormous dangers of the toxic chemicals in the tailings ponds.

• (1240)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Orihel.

There is a vote. I assume all committee members are in agreement about following the same practice we did for the last vote. We'll continue until five minutes before the vote.

We now have Ms. McFadyen from the Assiniboine River Basin Initiative.

Go ahead. You have five minutes.

Ms. Wanda McFadyen (Executive Director, Assiniboine River Basin Initiative): Mr. Chair and committee members, on behalf of the Assiniboine River Basin Initiative, thank you for the opportunity to present before you today.

The Assiniboine River basin is a sub-basin within the Lake Winnipeg basin, which comprises the Qu'Appelle, Souris and Assiniboine rivers. The basin is approximately 162,000 square kilometres and home to over 1.7 million people.

As an organization, we are a multi-stakeholder non-profit that operates in both Canada and the United States. Our stakeholders include citizens, provincial and state governments, local governments, first nations tribes, Métis representatives, agricultural organizations, conservation and water-user organizations, cottage asso-

ciations, business and industry groups, and all others who wish to come to the table on behalf of water.

It's my understanding that the committee has been asked to examine numerous topics in their consideration of responsibilities for freshwater protection and management throughout Canada. One of these topics is watershed management. That is the topic I was asked in my invitation to address.

As an organization, we have grown and matured since our inception. It has become clear that all stakeholders, at all levels, have vested interests in the role of true watershed management—not just management within a jurisdictional boundary of the watershed or basin in question, since we know water flows across the land and crosses these boundaries, be they municipal, provincial, state or international. We also know there are several smaller watersheds that merge and flow into the larger basins. For example, the Assiniboine starts in Saskatchewan, as do the Qu'Appelle and the Souris. They all cross provincial, state or international boundaries, so it's very important that we work together when we look at true watershed management.

Here in our basin, the flood of 2011 drove home the need for stakeholders across the Assiniboine River basin to come together to learn, understand and work on watershed management outside of jurisdictional boundaries. This flood devastated our basin. Thousands of people were displaced, and thousands of homes, businesses and acres of agricultural land were impacted. This was followed by a flood in 2014, which saw similar devastation across the basin. The flip side, of course, is drought, which we are experiencing at this point in time, along with dry agronomic conditions in various years. It is very real and needs to be looked at.

The underpinning of our organization is that a complete watershed approach must be embraced when looking at watershed management. There must be recognition that jurisdictional boundaries need to be reviewed. Legislation and policies need to be appreciated, but at the same time there is a need to work across them. The most important thing is transboundary communication, education, information sharing and co-operation on a watershed management scale. This is vitally important to our success as we move forward. Resilience is what our members are asking for. Integrated watershed management relates not only to water quality and quantity but also to increasing awareness about the importance and value of water—not only surface water but also groundwater. This management should consider ecosystem health, biodiversity, fish, wildlife and wetlands through applied best management practices and incentive opportunities for landowners.

The land issue should also be taken into consideration, because there is an interface between water and land management. This can be through regenerative agriculture, irrigation improvements, management of natural areas, storing water on the landscape and a host of other tools.

Investment in science, research and technology needs to occur, in order to optimize water management to the best of our ability. There is the development of various models and tools, such as Aquant's hydrogeospheric model, the prairie hydrology design and analysis product, LiDAR and others. Tools need to be put into the tool box to allow watershed managers to do the best job they can.

We also need to recognize and consider the three-legged stool of sustainability, those legs being social, economic and environmental. As an organization, we have worked across our basin with various organizations, such as the International Souris River Board, the Shellmouth Dam liaison committee and the Saskatchewan water council. We're engaged in research with the prairie water research committee under global water futures, the University of Regina, the University of Manitoba and a multitude of others.

• (1245)

On behalf of ARBI, I would encourage the committee to work across jurisdictional boundaries, be they municipal, provincial, or in some cases international, when considering water management. Communication, coordination and co-operation are all common goals leading to success.

To invest in working with grassroots stakeholders and organizations such as ourselves, the indigenous community, agriculture, conservation and a host of others—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Unfortunately, I have to interrupt you, but you can share your information and knowledge during the question period.

Mr. Hudon, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Marc Hudon (Member, Forum for Leadership on Water): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today.

When we talk about water management on a watershed scale, we often think of lakes. In my case, the experience I've had is mainly

linked to the St. Lawrence River as a whole and the Lake Ontario system. So I'm going to talk to you about that for a few minutes.

I'd like to tell you about two concrete success stories involving essential ingredients for water governance at the watershed level. The first is the St. Lawrence Action Plan, which came into being in the early 1990s and covers the entire St. Lawrence River. It is a federal government initiative in which the Quebec government is also participating.

The second model involves the regulation of the waters of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, as a result of the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909. Its purpose is to regulate the flow of water from Lake Ontario into the St. Lawrence River. This enables all its uses, from supplying drinking water to commercial navigation and hydroelectricity.

These two models have been in use since their inception, thanks to key ingredients to make the recipe for water governance a long-term success. I'm talking here about respecting areas of jurisdiction, for example. It's never perfect, but it can work very well. We're talking about a vision and a mission adapted to the reality of each watershed. Local and regional knowledge, sustained scientific research and studies, citizen involvement in all processes and ongoing communications are key elements.

In the case of the St. Lawrence Action Plan, the government of Canada staffed the plan with leaders who believed in its mission, and who themselves formed work teams with champions for the various areas of activity to come. The strong commitment of these champions, who had both soft skills and know-how, was instrumental, and was reflected in the steps taken to establish a respectful collaboration with Quebec government representatives. It also ended up selecting its own champions, from among the many government departments involved, to participate in the development and implementation of areas of activity aimed at protecting the water of the St. Lawrence River.

Together, they promoted and supported citizen involvement through a non-profit organization called *Stratégies Saint-Laurent*. This organization coordinated the creation of ZIP committees for areas of prime concern along the St. Lawrence River. These multi-sector round tables established along the shores of the St. Lawrence and Saguenay rivers represent a form of participatory water governance for territories, in which local and regional players have worked together for decades. The efforts and work of each table generally complement the efforts of those in neighbouring sectors.

The other model I'd like to talk about concerns water level regulation in the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario watershed. The International Joint Commission, a binational body established in 1909, created an international board to regulate water levels on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. In this example, respect for jurisdictions, knowledge sharing, constant updating of data and scientific knowledge are necessary to regulate water levels to meet upstream and downstream water needs as equally as possible.

Added to this is the board's own culture of transparency, supported by sustained joint communication efforts. These are necessary to inform people about how we respond to their recurring needs and problems, and to improve their understanding of water level management. The board strives to take into account their reality at all times, wherever they may be located within the watershed, without neglecting other quieter needs, such as those of ecosystems, i.e., ecological needs.

These two examples are not perfect. Several other initiatives have been launched, such as the Regroupement des organismes de bassins versants du Québec, or ROBVQ. This organization plays an essential role, as does Stratégies Saint-Laurent, through the key elements I've mentioned, such as sustained communication efforts. The same is true of similar initiatives elsewhere in the country.

For a long time, we wondered how we could unite all these local initiatives, from east to west and north to south, in a complementary way. The arrival of climate change is well documented, and populations across the country are directly affected by its dramatic consequences. These include, as we said earlier, forest fires, melting glaciers and the destruction of infrastructure.

The severity of these consequences across Canada is a possible thread that could motivate our government to present a vision linking and complementing existing watershed management initiatives to mitigate these negative effects and foster collaboration on an unprecedented scale.

● (1250)

I'd like to conclude by reminding you that, for the members of the group I represent, the Forum for Leadership on Water, or FLOW, it's important that water management be based on the following five pillars: reconciliation with indigenous peoples, knowledge creation and mobilization, co-operative federalism, the watershed-scale approach, of course, and deep reform of our laws and regulations.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mazier, you now have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming this afternoon.

I'll start with Ms. McFadyen.

The Assiniboine River Basin Initiative covers quite a bit of Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba and North Dakota as well—dips down into Minot and comes up. All that water ends up at The Forks

in Winnipeg, and that's still all the same. Is that right? I don't know if it continues into Alberta or not, but it's quite a massive area in most of the Prairies.

I understand that Terry Duguid is the Prime Minister's special adviser for water. Seeing that the Prime Minister's water adviser is from Winnipeg... We always say in Manitoba that all water in Manitoba leads to The Forks. I assume that the Assiniboine River Basin Initiative has consulted with Terry Duguid about the Canada water agency.

Ms. Wanda McFadyen: Thank you, committee member Mazier.

Yes, we have requested a meeting with MP Duguid. We are waiting for confirmation on that to learn more about the new Canada water agency, which is going to be based here in Winnipeg.

The Assiniboine River basin covers a large portion of southeastern Saskatchewan. Headwaters go as far west as Moose Jaw and Regina, as far north as Yorkton, bordering on Crow Lake, and then down to Minot, while they all flow back into Manitoba to meet the Red River at The Forks.

● (1255)

Mr. Dan Mazier: You've asked for a meeting. How long have you been waiting?

Ms. Wanda McFadyen: We requested a meeting about four weeks ago, so we're hoping that we'll hear from MP Duguid in the very near future.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Okay.

Can you explain the difference between a watershed approach and a water basin approach? You talked a lot about that, but how does the basin-wide approach work?

Ms. Wanda McFadyen: The basin-wide approach is a level above a watershed. The Assiniboine River basin, for example, is comprised of three smaller watersheds—the Qu'Appelle, the Assiniboine and the Souris, the Souris being the main stem. All of those waters converge through those systems into the Assiniboine before they meet the Red River, so it's all part of the larger Lake Winnipeg basin. If you have the ability to look at that map, it includes a large chunk of Alberta and Saskatchewan. It includes the Red River system, which goes into the U.S. and Lake of the Woods, so it's a huge area that all comes into Lake Winnipeg and then flows north into Hudson Bay.

It's important, on a transboundary scale, for individuals or organizations to work across those borders, because those waters do flow, and legislation, policy, regulations and international law all impact that water. That's all part of where we live and work. Whether you're receiving it or delivering it, it's important that you work with your neighbours and understand their positions and where they come from. That's what we try to do as an organization, transcend those boundaries, share information and co-operate so there is a better understanding in each jurisdiction.

Mr. Dan Mazier: It's nice that you touched on that transboundary responsibility.

Do you have any advice for us as we work on this study in working with international borders? What should we consider in this study?

Ms. Wanda McFadyen: Within the international boundaries, what we have learned with Saskatchewan, Manitoba and North Dakota with international waters is that the International Joint Commission looks at those. There are boundary treaties in place, but you also have to have co-operation and understanding at the grassroots level. It's important to build that trust, to share and to invite those individuals to bring their knowledge to the table.

When I say "grassroots", I am referring not only to organizations like ours but to the indigenous community, agriculture and conservation. All of those groups bring a piece of the puzzle to the table to better understand water, and we can all learn from each other and build the trust and the network that are so vital to watershed management success.

Mr. Dan Mazier: That leads to my next question.

I call them landscape managers. They're out there; they're living in the areas. They can have the biggest impact the most quickly, and they're probably the most affordable as well, at the end of the day.

Earlier today, one of the witnesses talked about natural infrastructure. We all know where to store water. We all know where it belongs, and we can work with Mother Nature at that time.

Can you provide some advice for the federal government for when we deal with water, even if it comes down to the water agency? What things should we consider? Can you tell us how important it is to make sure that those voices are at the table at all times and how important that communication is?

The Chair: You have about 45 seconds.

Ms. Wanda McFadyen: That's important to the success. Those grassroots individuals across all genres need to be at the table. They live it and breathe it every day. They can tell you where best to position a small water storage body. They can tell you the history of the flows. It's very important that they come to the table and that their knowledge, education and what they bring from the land be shared.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you. That should be it.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Chatel, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here with us today.

Mr. Hudon, your organization, FLOW, really pushed for the creation of the Canada Water Agency, or CWA. Now that this has been done, do you have any specific recommendations for the agency's priorities?

• (1300)

Mr. Marc Hudon: The priority I have in mind is to appoint champions within the departments concerned, specifically to encourage partnerships with the various authorities at the local level, in the provinces, across Canada. This is one of the key elements that I consider to be the foundation, if I may say so.

Ms. McFadyen spoke earlier about the importance of listening to the grassroots. My image of that is of a pyramid. You have to go from the bottom up. All this work, the vision adopted by the agency and by the people who will initially be put in place, will be reflected throughout the structure, so as to mobilize and involve people at the grassroots level to take ownership of this vision in the field. In my opinion, this is a key element. This is the first step, the starting point.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: What challenges do you think this agency will have to overcome?

Mr. Marc Hudon: Among the challenges it will have to overcome, in my opinion, is the need for its leaders to be people who, rather than protecting their exclusive preserve, are transparent about the government's vision for the Department of Environment and Climate Change.

The agency really needs to put in place people who believe in this mission, so as to avoid pitfalls and internal slowdowns in the structure. This would disappoint the public, whose expectations are high. As we heard in the testimony, in Canada, everything to do with water, including regulations, is compartmentalized and subdivided between different departments, and it's very difficult to find your way around.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: We'll have to break down the silos; that's what we'll have to do. I agree with you.

I'd like to talk about the Canada-Quebec Agreement on the St. Lawrence, which expires in 2026. I'd like to hear Ms. Beisner's comments, and I'll come back to you, Mr. Hudon, because you also have a special interest in the St. Lawrence River.

Ms. Beisner, what do you see as the main considerations in renegotiating this agreement?

The Chair: Just a moment, Ms. Chatel. I have to interrupt you to check a point.

After you, Ms. Chatel, there will be plenty of time left for Ms. Puzé and Mr. Bachrach.

You have the floor, Ms. Beisner.

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: My expertise is not in politics or governance, but more in science. The agreement is certainly very critical. We need to value it. As mentioned by the ZIP committee representatives, I find the round tables very useful in terms of water management.

I'm the director of a research group, and we often take part in these meetings. They provide a forum for building consensus between the various parties responsible for water and other elements of society, who often call on scientific experts. So I think it's a great way of bringing people together around the goal of better water conservation.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: If I understand your recommendation correctly, we'd need to set up a round table with all the stakeholders involved to reach the best possible agreement.

Is that right?

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: I think this could help, but, as I said, this kind of policy is not part of my expertise.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I think that's a very good suggestion.

I'd also like to hear Mr. Hudon's opinion on this topic.

The Chair: Please be brief. You have a maximum of 50 seconds to speak.

Mr. Marc Hudon: First, I'd like to clarify that I do not have an interest in the St. Lawrence Action Plan. I haven't been involved for years, but I recognize the relevance of this initiative because it pays off in the long term.

One of the major aspects of the St. Lawrence Action Plan at present is the renewal of the St. Lawrence River Navigation Coordination Committee. This committee is composed of representatives from commercial shipping, recreational boating, municipal affairs, research and scientific organizations, and so on, to ensure the sustainable development of the St. Lawrence River.

The Navigation Coordination Committee has been in existence since the beginning of the St. Lawrence Action Plan. However, we are entering a phase where, as elsewhere, governments want to maximize the positive spin-offs of navigation...

• (1305)

The Chair: Unfortunately, we have to stop here to vote.

We'll be back to finish the round with Ms. Pauzé and Mr. Bachrach.

I'm going to suspend the sitting for about 10 minutes.

Thank you.

• (1305)

(Pause)

• (1315)

[English]

The Chair: My question to the committee is, do you want to keep going after 1:30 so that we do a second round?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden: We can only if Taylor can stay, but I don't think he can.

The Chair: Taylor can't stay.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'm leaving at 1:30.

[Translation]

The Chair: All right.

Where were we? It was Ms. Pauzé's turn.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for coming, especially those who travelled here.

Ms. Beisner, you're co-director of Canada's largest freshwater ecology research network, which is something. The Interuniversity Research Group in Limnology, or GRIL, is indeed one of the leading networks on an international scale. You head a team of scientists, but you also publish popular science articles, in which you communicate your knowledge to readers.

Have you seen a growing interest not only from academia, but also from the general public, in the issues you deal with?

• (1320)

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: Yes, absolutely.

We recently received funding from the Quebec government to do more projects for the general public. For example, we created a podcast called "Balad'eau." We also organized webinars. This is something we wanted to do in person, but COVID-19 meant we had to do it virtually. In the end, it worked out well, because we recorded the webinars and made them available to people afterwards. We have a lot of public participation. At the end of the webinars, there's a question and answer period. Questions are often based on concrete cases. For example, someone with a lakeside cottage will ask us questions about problems specific to their situation.

In my opinion, what the public needs is a concentration of knowledge.

I also think that the Canada Water Agency could promote best practices in water management. For example, it could explain to river, lake and streamside residents how they can better protect their environment. It could do the same for agricultural and mining activities.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I would even add industrial activities.

You're talking about the Canada Water Agency. Has anyone from this agency contacted your group?

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: No.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: It seems to me it should have, since you're the experts.

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: When there was a call for briefs, we submitted one too.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: From what you've told me, it sounds like people are calling to tell you about problems with their lake or other water source. However, these are not watersheds. If I understand correctly, these are hydrological problems. When people have problems related to their lake, they want answers. But the answer lies on a much broader scale.

Can you tell us about it?

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: The message we're trying to convey is that activities around a lake or stream have consequences. As I mentioned in my speech, even when activities are carried out far from the waterway of interest, they are often the cause of the problems. So we need to work with all the stakeholders in a watershed to manage specific, localized problems.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: If I understand correctly, people need to be educated. They ask you questions about what they could do in the specific case of their own lake, but the question is broader than that.

Some water experts believe that we need to have a frank and wide-ranging discussion on conflicts over the use of the resource. Earlier, you raised the issue of agricultural and industrial activities. There's a conflict between biodiversity and resource preservation, on the one hand, and the economy and all the infrastructure serving communities on the other.

Can you tell us about water use conflicts in the 21st century?

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: Conflicts are most common in southern Canada, which is densely populated. I don't know what the best way to safeguard aquatic environments is, but one way would be to protect what hasn't yet been too impacted. We need to ensure that there are north-south corridors, and also at altitude, so that certain organisms can find themselves in suitable aquatic environments, even in the wake of climate change. This is really important.

We need to move towards environmental planning and give priority to certain areas. There are many discussions underway following last year's COP15 and the target set to protect 30% of the planet by 2030. I'm taking part in the work currently being done in Quebec to define these areas, be they freshwater or terrestrial. These are very important discussions to have.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: We have about 30 seconds left together.

You talk a lot about what can happen for watersheds, so on a local scale. On the other hand, you say that the Canada Water Agency could help, although they haven't contacted you.

Don't you think that local management would be the best solution?

• (1325)

The Chair: Please answer quickly.

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: I'm not sure I understood your question. When you talk about local management, do you mean management by the people who live near the watershed?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Yes.

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: Yes, that would be optimal. However, we still need to take a national view, given that borders are often crossed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bachrach will be the last speaker, because he has to leave after and we won't have a quorum. However, we will try to invite the witnesses for 30 minutes another time so that they can finish answering our questions.

Mr. Bachrach, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Noting that we have only five minutes left in the meeting, I'd like to move the motion that was put on notice several days ago.

I move:

That, given the importance of freshwater ecosystem services to the prosperity, sustainability, and resilience of British Columbian communities, and given the increasingly severe impacts of climate change including drought, wildfires—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Chair, I'd like to raise a point of order.

The Chair: I'm listening, Ms. Pauzé.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Bachrach reads a little too fast. Without the text, the interpreter can't provide an adequate interpretation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Can you speak a little more slowly?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'd be happy to.

Mr. Chair, I would like to move the motion that was put on notice several days ago. I'll try to do this nice and slow so it's interpreted for our colleagues.

I move:

That, given the importance of freshwater ecosystem services to the prosperity, sustainability, and resilience of British Columbian communities, and given the increasingly severe impacts of climate change including drought, wildfires, and floods, the committee urge the federal government to work with the Government of British Columbia to establish a \$1 billion watershed security fund; that the Committee report this to the House; and that the government table a written response.

If I could speak to this briefly, Mr. Chair, I found the testimony of Mr. Jesse Zeman, from the BC Wildlife Federation, particularly compelling. He laid out the watershed restoration work that his organization's members have conducted over the past number of years. Looking at notes from that meeting, it looks like, since 2021, the BC Wildlife Federation has delivered over 230 projects and over 10 million dollars' worth of on-the-ground restoration. Their partners include first nations, environmental NGOs, local communities, private landowners, the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia.

Speaking of the Province of British Columbia, the province I live in has recently committed an investment of \$100 million to this watershed security fund. I think that this vision of a billion-dollar fund that can go into the sort of grassroots activity that Mr. Zeman was speaking to represents a really exciting opportunity. A broad cross-section of British Columbia is engaged in this work. I think it brings together groups from different sectors to work together toward the security of freshwater ecosystems. Particularly in the wake of the atmospheric rivers that we saw in B.C. and the class 5 drought this year, which was really devastating for our region's farmers, this work has never been more important than it is now.

I think that, with this idea of working with the Province of B.C., with private philanthropic investors and the federal government, we can put together a fund that is large enough to make a significant difference in our watersheds.

Maybe, Mr. Chair, I'll leave it at that. I think that Ms. Botelho, who presented earlier in this meeting from Watersheds BC, also spoke to the importance of this work. If the committee can send a

strong message to the federal government that they want to see this kind of matching investment....

Here's what I want to note, Mr. Chair: The federal government's freshwater action plan to date has seen a sizable investment in the Great Lakes and in Lake Winnipeg. Of the \$70.5 million that's been committed, \$44.8 million has gone to the Great Lakes, and \$25.7 million to Lake Winnipeg. In British Columbia, we see a provincial government that is very motivated to work on these freshwater issues—the issues of watershed security. I think it really behooves the federal government to come to the table with a matching investment, so we can build this fund and empower the kind of grassroots work that Mr. Zeman was talking about.

With that, Mr. Chair, and noting that it's exactly 1:30, I would like to move that this motion be postponed until Tuesday, December 5, at 11 a.m.

• (1330)

The Chair: I guess we vote on that.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

The Chair: We're going to be debating this on the 5th. We're losing quorum now, so the meeting is essentially adjourned.

We will be asking the witnesses if they can participate for another half-hour at another time via video conference.

Thank you very much to the witnesses. Hopefully we'll see you soon via video conference.

Thank you.

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