



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 111

Tuesday, June 4, 2024

Chair: Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia



Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Tuesday, June 4, 2024

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Good afternoon, colleagues.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Chair, I would just like to be put on the speaking list for the net-zero accelerator fund discussion.

The Chair: Yes, for sure. That's for when we do the third hour.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Yes. I want to be on that list.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's what we would have done anyway, to be honest. I think that's how it works.

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our second-to-last meeting on the study on freshwater policy.

Before we start, for the benefit of the witnesses here in person—and I think all witnesses are in person today—we've been dealing with issues around feedback and its impact on the interpreters. The House has instituted a new protocol, which is that you should separate the earpiece and the microphone by a good distance so there's no feedback. If you're not using your earpiece, put it face down on this coaster-like sticker on the desk so there will be no feedback.

That being said, welcome to our witnesses. Welcome especially to Mr. Donnelly, who was an inhabitant of this place for a while and someone with whom I had the pleasure to work. He was well-known as a very collegial member of Parliament whom everyone appreciated.

We'll start with Mr. Donnelly for five minutes, and then go to Mr. Jaques from the Water Security Agency of British Columbia.

Go ahead.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Parliamentary Secretary, Fisheries and Aquaculture, Government of British Columbia): Thank you very much, Chair. It's great to be here.

I'm joined by James Mack, the ADM for water, land and resource stewardship.

Good afternoon. I'd like to acknowledge that I'm on the territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation. I'm Fin Donnelly, B.C.'s first Parliamentary Secretary for Watershed Restoration with the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, and I'm the MLA for Coquitlam-Burke Mountain.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee as a representative of British Columbia and to discuss a matter that lies at the heart of my life's work: fresh water and the protection, restoration and stewardship of watersheds.

Growing up on the banks of B.C.'s longest river, the mighty Fraser, I developed an intrinsic connection to its waters. It led me to swimming the 1,400-kilometre length of the river twice, first in 1995 and again in 2000, before my political life, to draw attention to its declining health and to encourage communities to better steward the river. The experience not only strengthened my resolve to safeguard our waterways, but it inspired me to found the Rivershed Society of B.C. in 1996, with a focus on the importance of water to British Columbians.

My work led me to politics, first in local government, then as a member of Parliament and now as an MLA in British Columbia. It's become apparent that British Columbians share my view that clean, fresh, abundant water is critical for our province's success. Healthy watersheds are foundational to the social, environmental and economic systems supporting B.C. Water powers our economy and is critical in supporting our food, fish and drinking water.

B.C.'s watershed sector contributes over \$5 billion to the province's GDP and supports 75,000 jobs. Watersheds play an essential role in constructing homes needed to support jobs and workers. Access to water sources determines where our communities can flourish and thrive. All animals, especially wild salmon, rely on clean, cold, abundant fresh water to survive.

Water is one of our greatest allies in the face of climate change. Healthy watersheds function as resilient buffers that reduce and even prevent the impacts and costs related to floods, droughts and wildfires. The severity of last summer's droughts and wildfires in B.C., and the potential for drought and wildfire this summer demonstrate the need for early investment in watershed resiliency, restoration, rebuilding and infrastructure initiatives.

That's why B.C. has taken action to codevelop its first-ever watershed security strategy with first nations and establish a \$100-million watershed security fund to support work needed to improve outcomes for our watersheds. Codevelopment of the strategy has occurred predominantly through the B.C.-First Nations Water Table, but ongoing relationships have been made with first nations leadership, modern-day treaty nations and existing government-to-government tables.

As seen through B.C. and Canada's joint efforts on the cofunded B.C. salmon restoration and innovation fund, B.C. and the Government of Canada both recognize the importance of keeping watersheds healthy for people, local economies and ecosystems.

Since 2019, our governments have provided \$285 million in support of projects to protect wild salmon. We have made important progress together, but without continued efforts to improve watershed security, our watersheds are at risk from drought, floods, fires, climate change, urban development and industrial uses. B.C.'s watershed security strategy is responsive to these pressures and will shape the future of watersheds and watershed management, but more support for this work is needed to achieve our shared goals.

The current \$100-million watershed security fund must grow to meet the scale of water challenges facing British Columbia. Current estimates suggest that a minimum of \$1 billion is required to support strategic investments in infrastructure, recovery and watershed resilience. Federal funding is needed to support the investment work and work already being led by the province and first nations. A commitment of a federal contribution over 10 years is another opportunity for Canada and B.C. to work together through the watershed security strategy to support sustained, strategic, transformational action in B.C.

• (1535)

In closing, I ask that this committee recommend that the federal government join British Columbia in investing in initiatives like the watershed security strategy and fund, to lay the groundwork for a more resilient and prosperous future.

Thank you again for inviting me here on this important study.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly. As a former parliamentarian in the House and a current parliamentarian in British Columbia, you managed to keep exactly to your allotted speaking time.

Before continuing, I'd like to welcome Mr. Généreux, who is replacing Mr. Deltell.

We will now move on to Mr. Shawn Jaques, president and chief executive officer of the Water Security Agency, who is accompanied by Mr. David Cooper, vice-president, agriculture services and economic development.

Mr. Jaques, please go ahead for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Shawn Jaques (President and Chief Executive Officer, Water Security Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for inviting me back to the committee and for allowing us to appear again.

Today I'd like to build on my previous remarks to reinforce the importance that responsible water management, which is sustainable, adaptable and reliable, is not only clearly good for Saskatchewan communities, producers and industry, but is also beneficial for habitat, aquatic species and the environment.

Saskatchewan is home to an estimated more than 110,000 lakes and rivers, representing some of the most abundant freshwater resources in North America. The Water Security Agency plays a critical role in managing our abundant water resources through proactive operation of Saskatchewan's network of 74 dams and hundreds of kilometres of conveyance channels.

We oversee more than 600 drinking water and more than 800 waste-water facilities. Water Security Agency scientists also study and analyze wildlife and plant life. WSA carries out water testing and sampling to help understand and track the quality and quantity of water. Last year WSA gathered over 500 water quality samples in lakes and rivers across the province.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of WSA managing water levels at Lake Diefenbaker to help protect the endangered piping plover. Since 2014 we have seen a rise in the number of plover hatchlings to reach maturity by over 550%. Nesting sites are up almost 150% in the same time span. We take the health of habitat and water quality very seriously, with investments and studies to back it up.

Many of you will know that agriculture is the backbone of Saskatchewan's economy and that we are Canada's leading exporter of almost all agricultural products. What you may not know is that our province is home to some of the most environmentally sustainable products in the world. Our no-till and zero-till practices and lower fertilizer applications are responsible for Saskatchewan farmers having a carbon footprint 95% lower than competitive jurisdictions around the world. Our producers are the best stewards of the land and have been for over 100 years. It is our livelihood, so we must be.

It is amazing to consider that Saskatchewan has half of Canada's arable acres. Based on our recent studies, we now know that 86% of the wetlands in our province are undrained. There is room to develop in a sustainable way to gain the benefits of agricultural water management, which includes economic growth, gained efficiencies and improved soil health. We are working on a stewardship policy to do just that. This is something no other jurisdiction in Canada has done before.

Over the last year and a half, WSA has engaged a total of 80 stakeholder organizations and first nation and Métis communities in the creation of this stewardship policy. With input from engagement and learning from our practical demonstration and research projects, WSA is developing a policy that will support our producers, allowing for economic growth while protecting our environment. This is very important work, because the sustainable production of food will be needed.

Earlier this year, the Province of Saskatchewan announced it's moving forward with the first 90,000 acres of the larger Lake Diefenbaker irrigation projects. Irrigation also acts as one of the simplest and best adaptation measures against varying climate conditions. It helps us be more resilient and sustainable during both flood and drought situations.

What if this project not only contributed to the economy while helping adapt to a changing climate but also then lowered emissions? Building on the success of Saskatchewan's dryland farming, expanding irrigation promises additional economic and climate change benefits. The Lake Diefenbaker irrigation project will produce over 297 million kilograms more food per year.

Based on our initial research, irrigated crop acres will be 16% less emissions-intensive than our already carbon-efficient dryland crops. That means the amount of crop produced in the entire Lake Diefenbaker irrigation project would be grown with 126,000 tonnes fewer emissions per year than if the equivalent amount had been grown on dryland conditions. Over 20 years, the project will account for over 2.5 million tonnes of avoided emissions.

That is why we think this project needs your attention. We're going to be producing more crops on the same land base with fewer emissions per tonne of crop produced. Based on what we know, this project helps economic growth while lowering emissions. It is something for which we would ask each of you to support the federal government being a partner.

In closing, I would like to say that responsible freshwater management holds immense potential for Canada, with strengthened food security, climate resilience, water sustainability and lasting economic benefits. I believe we are doing just that in Saskatchewan.

Thank you very much.

• (1540)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Jaques.

We'll now go to Mr. Kram, who will begin the round of questions.

[English]

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll start with the representatives from the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency. If I understand your position correctly, the Government of Saskatchewan is in favour of the creation of the Canada water agency, subject to some of the particulars about its actual mandate. Can I just get some clarity from the witnesses on that?

Mr. Shawn Jaques: Thanks, Mr. Kram.

We do support the creation of the Canada water agency if it doesn't have a role as a regulator. That's something our province has been adamant about from day one. We believe maintaining provincial autonomy over water management is key for Saskatchewan, and I know that a number of our neighbouring provinces have the same view.

We have expressed our concerns in the past. If the agency were created, not as a duplication of the services provinces are already providing but rather as something that is support-focused, a Canada water agency could have many benefits, not only for Saskatchewan but also for other provinces in Canada, much as the PFRA did many years ago. It could allow for collaboration on major water projects and cost-sharing opportunities, similar to what the PFRA did many years ago by building a lot of the structures across our province, as well as for information and knowledge sharing.

I think those are some of the benefits that could be realized with the agency. However we don't see the need for it to have a regulatory role since we're already doing that.

• (1545)

Mr. Michael Kram: Has the federal government reached out to the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency to have a formal consultation process regarding the agency's mandate?

Mr. Shawn Jaques: We've had some meetings with the federal government over that as they've been navigating setting up the agency, and we've been communicating some of our concerns. In fact, later this week, I will have another meeting with Environment Canada on that as well.

Mr. Michael Kram: Just to be clear, when it comes to the cost-sharing opportunities, is it safe to say that the Lake Diefenbaker project is at the top of the wish list for the Government of Saskatchewan?

Mr. Shawn Jaques: Yes.

I've explained some of what we see as the benefits of the Lake Diefenbaker irrigation project. It's a generational project. It's going to be there for decades. There's also a significant benefit from that project for the federal government and for the province. That's why we believe there is room for a federal partner in building out this project.

Mr. Michael Kram: Can you speak to any similar opportunities? Are there any other major irrigation projects on the drawing board, so to speak, either in Saskatchewan or in other provinces that you're aware of?

Mr. Shawn Jaques: Yes. I'll maybe get David to jump in here as well.

We look for opportunities and the expansion of irrigation in other parts of the province, not just around Lake Diefenbaker, so there are opportunities for funding. I know our neighbours to the west in Alberta have also expanded their irrigation as well.

I don't know, David, if you have anything else to add.

Mr. David Cooper (Vice-President, Agriculture Services and Economic Development, Water Security Agency): Thank you for the question.

I would maybe add that, in addition to the west side project that we've profiled, there are other significant developments that are under contemplation that would also require significant capital. The west side project is definitely top of our heap, but we are engaged with other irrigation districts looking at opportunities, and those would come with significant costs as well.

To echo Shawn's previous comments, an opportunity to secure a federal grant would be a huge push forward for those projects, because carrying them from the provincial and producer level alone can be a tall ask since these projects do have a large upfront cost. Obviously they provide benefit for many years, but that initial build-out is quite costly.

Mr. Michael Kram: Can you speak to any climate adaptation initiatives or policies that the provincial government has, either in the form of the Lake Diefenbaker project or in other projects or initiatives?

Mr. Shawn Jaques: I'll start and then David can add any comments.

Lake Diefenbaker in itself, I think, is supporting that. It's a large storage reservoir. It holds about eight million acre-feet of water. It's a very large man-made reservoir. We use it to capture and store water in years when there's excess precipitation or excess water flowing on the Saskatchewan River. Then we use the reservoir for irrigating or providing water to communities in years when there's a lack of precipitation, and in the last few years, we saw in our province that there was a need for that extra water.

I don't know if you have anything to add.

Mr. David Cooper: Yes, I would maybe add a little.

Lake Diefenbaker truly is unique in the lack of development that has occurred with respect to the water that is available there. This has been studied by academics in Saskatchewan. Dr. John Pomeroy, who has appeared before the committee, is one of those whom we've heard from on this matter. His research is forecasting a 20% increase in inflows into the lake in the future. That's in addition to the water that we believe, through our assessment, is available for development right now.

It truly is a very underdeveloped opportunity. When you look at the challenges that we see in terms of reliable and timely precipitation, obviously irrigation can address those concerns.

It truly is a great opportunity. We're doing our best to tell the story as broadly as we can because it's something that really should be brought forward, not just for Saskatchewan but we believe for Canada's interests as well.

Mr. Shawn Jaques: May I add something, Mr. Kram?

When the lake was created back in the 1960s, 500,000 acres of irrigation was the vision. We're currently only at 145,000 acres. We've only achieved 20% of that vision. There's a lot more room for growth.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Ali now for six minutes.

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Through you, Chair, thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Donnelly, thank you for sharing that story of swimming in that river and your love for the river and the bank. It's really important. I see that water is alive. That's how I put it in one word. If I have to state the importance of the water, I would say it's life. Without water, there's no life.

In your view, what role do you believe the Canada water agency can have in British Columbia's context?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you for the question, Mr. Ali.

I do appreciate those comments. Water is critical. It was critical to me in my early development, 30 years ago, and it's become even more so now as we've seen the pressures mounting on water.

The Canada water agency is very needed. It can play an important function in bringing provinces and territories together to focus on the challenges that lie ahead, which are enormous. The science and the monitoring that it can bring attention to are critical. I know the agency has reached out to our government and is looking for partnerships and ways that our governments can work together, which I think is critically important.

If there are one or two things that I could stress—one I already did in my presentation in terms of looking at further investments, and I think those investments are absolutely needed—I would encourage Canada to consider a broader view of the impacts on water or focus on addressing water. Drinking water is critically important to all Canadians and to the Canadian economy, but so are the impacts from drought, floods and wildfires, and they need to be addressed.

That, I believe, will take an all-of-government approach from multiple ministries to engage in how that is addressed. Further investment and a slightly broader agenda are needed, as we have taken in the province.

Maybe I'll ask ADM Mack if there's anything else I've missed.

Mr. James Mack (Assistant Deputy Minister, Government of British Columbia): No, I think—

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you. My time is running out.

As we all know, climate change is having a significant impact on our freshwater resources.

Can you discuss the importance of emissions reduction efforts and B.C.'s approach to protecting freshwater resources, please?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

I'll jump in really quickly and maybe let James add to it.

I think the two are critically linked. You can actually get to solutions by focusing on water and encouraging everyone. The impact on climate affects all economies and all sectors. From housing to transportation, many industries require water, certainly in British Columbia. Some require it more than others. Agriculture, mining and oil and gas all require water. If there's too much coming from one sector, that puts pressure on other sectors.

Abundant flows are critical. As we see receding glaciers and impacts on groundwater and surface water supplies, it's going to be critical that we figure those out. We've been working closely with our agriculture community—cattlemen, dairy and others—to address these concerns. It's going to take everyone working together on that.

Mr. James Mack: I would just add that for B.C. we have started with an ambitious approach on mitigating climate change. We have a CleanBC strategy that we're well into the implementation of. For the province, a first step is to take serious action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There is a climate preparedness and adaptation strategy that has been in place now for years with significant funding. A key element of that is rethinking water and how we manage water.

I'll just flag a few specifics.

One is that our emergency management ministry is now the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness. When the parliamentary secretary talks about floods, droughts and wildfires, these are increasingly being thought of as climate emergencies, so the responses change.

Second, as the parliamentary secretary noted, he's our first PS for watershed restoration. We now have a Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, so we have a provincial minister who is the political leader for the province on water.

In our submission for the Canada water agency, we actually thought that would be a useful partner. It would be a whole-of-government approach on policy for water, with an ability to give funding through partnerships so that we can get to work.

In B.C., it's impossible for the province to act alone. We need farmers, ranchers, first nations, large industries and the federal government. We can't have just individual programs operating in silos anymore.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. James Mack: We need a partner that comes in a collaborative way.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Pauzé.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): I'd like to thank the witnesses for having travelled in order to be here.

Mr. Ali asked Mr. Donnelly the question I had for him. So I'll ask Mr. Shawn.

Mr. Shawn, in your introductory remarks, you spoke at length about agriculture.... I think you're looking for the interpretation channel, Mr. Shawn. I'll wait until you find it.

[*English*]

Mr. Shawn Jaques: I'm sorry. Can you just repeat the question?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Of course.

In your address, you spoke at length about agriculture and irrigation. Water is indeed important for agriculture. I'm tempted to say that it's important for us too. I've always said that since our bodies are two-thirds water, it must be what's called an essential service.

The climate is warming now. We know the causes and the consequences of climate warming. In a province like yours, which is mainly based on agriculture, have you begun to think about the floods, droughts and related water shortages that will occur with climate change?

Do you plan to deal concurrently with mitigating and adapting to climate change?

[*English*]

Mr. Shawn Jaques: Thank you for the question.

What our agency is responsible for is the management of water. We have a Ministry of Environment as well. You're absolutely right. Water is important not only for agriculture but also for humans, for industry and for recreation.

What I would say is that how we're adapting to the changing weather patterns is in how we operate the structures that we have. A good example is that last year we saw probably some of the lowest flows on record for the South Saskatchewan River, so we changed the outflows of Lake Diefenbaker, making sure that we didn't impact downstream users and downstream communities. We released less water than we normally would to capture as much water as we could and bring up the level of that reservoir to ensure that we had enough water for all of the users. With the changing weather pattern, I think the way we're operating those structures has an impact.

Mr. Donnelly talked about working with all of the partners. We work with users as well. We saw some different structures in south-west Saskatchewan that didn't fill up because of a lack of precipitation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'll stop you there, Mr. Shawn, because we know that Saskatchewan is also an oil and gas-producing province. It's also known that climate change is caused in part by oil extraction.

Basically, what you have is the oil and gas sector and agriculture. You said in your introductory comments that this was happening mainly in Saskatchewan. That means that agriculture is threatened by climate change.

[*English*]

Mr. Shawn Jaques: We recognize that there are changing weather patterns. That's why, when we have a project or are engaged with some of these structures—like I said, we have 74 dams across our province—we make sure we manage it to have ample supplies of water for times when there isn't enough moisture out there. I think that's how we're adapting for agriculture.

I don't know if you have anything to add, David.

• (1600)

Mr. David Cooper: I have one small addition.

When Gardiner Dam and Lake Diefenbaker were contemplated, it was after the Great Depression and the dry period that had occurred. It was viewed as a drought-proofing project within Palliser's triangle. I think that's part of the reason why we continue to advocate for additional irrigation development. The water is there. The inflows are sustainable. This can help offset some of the concerns you raised in terms of challenges with a changing climate.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you for your reply, but at some point there's going to be drought and that will affect both ground-water and surface water, which means there's going to be a shortage of water.

Mr. Donnelly, you partly answered the question from my colleague Mr. Ali. I'd like to ask you a question about the Canada Water Agency.

Many different departments deal with water, in the territories, the provinces, the municipalities, and so on.

Do you think that the creation of the Canada Water Agency will amount to simply one more structure, or will it be a useful forum for discussion? Will it accomplish anything concrete?

What do you expect from this agency?

[*English*]

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you very much for the question.

I think it is a needed function. You can start with the commonality of monitoring and collecting information across the country. That's a way to bring everyone together to find out what the base problems are.

Moving forward, I think the agency can play a role. However, unless it is a coordinating function that brings all provinces and territories to the table in a collective and collaborative way to address these challenges—which it won't be able to do on its own and will need all of government for—it will be too much, even though I know I'm asking the agency to broaden its mandate.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have to stop there.

It's over to you now, Ms. Collins.

[*English*]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here. It's especially wonderful to see Mr. Donnelly here.

Thank you for your lifelong advocacy for water.

You talked a bit about how early investment in watershed protection ensures we are protecting communities in the face of the climate crisis. In the fall, my colleague Taylor Bachrach, the MP for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, presented a motion calling on the House to establish a \$1-billion watershed security fund. It's great that it passed through committee. Since then, all of my NDP colleagues have written to the Minister of Emergency Preparedness, calling on him to implement this fund. However, the funding so far is nowhere to be seen. We've heard from other witnesses that there has been a disparity between funding for the eastern parts of Canada compared with B.C.

What would a \$1-billion watershed security fund mean for B.C.?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you very much for the kind comments, Ms. Collins.

I do agree. If I could encourage all parties to support that motion, that would be a good, strong step in the right direction, moving forward with a \$1-billion investment. I know that we could leverage that funding from the federal government. We would come to the table in British Columbia with funding, but we would also immediately go to the private sector to engage as well, to leverage. We could turn that money into more investment and could work not only with our ministries but also with our industries as well in British Columbia.

I mentioned the \$100 million that B.C. has put into the watershed security fund. Prior to that, we also put \$57 million into particular projects, over two budget cycles, where communities, municipalities and nations were engaged in working at the local level with their watersheds. It was incredible. This was post-COVID, so to see people working in areas where they lost employment and to see them coming back into jobs in rural and urban communities was a really positive success story. That didn't stop there.

We also put another \$103 million, over two years, into agriculture. Last summer, we experienced drought in many communities. I wanted to add that we could see more drought in different communities unless we take these preventative measures. It's going to intensify the divisive reaction. We've had communities where they came together and built relationships, and they were able to talk to each other to avoid conflict. In some communities where those relationships don't exist, there was conflict. It pits user against user, and I think that is very problematic.

That, again, is perhaps beyond the Canada water agency, and that's where it's an all-of-government approach to work with provinces and territories. Those preventive measures with green infrastructure are absolutely critically important to protect wetlands, to protect riparian areas and to protect areas that will absorb that water in times of flood or drought.

• (1605)

Ms. Laurel Collins: The B.C. NDP government has been a leader when it comes to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. With the DRIPA, it seems like the province really spearheaded this. We've seen the federal government also pass legislation to uphold the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. B.C. seems to have a secretariat that is ensuring that this whole-of-government approach and all the legislation, policies and movement forward are going to be in line with the UN declaration.

In what ways can we learn? It seems like that's not happening in the same way at the federal level.

How has your government been prioritizing reconciliation with indigenous partners? How are you partnering with first nations in B.C. on this file, especially when it comes to watershed security?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you for the question.

B.C. is unique in that we have 204 nations within our province. All provinces and territories are different. I would encourage the government to reflect the diversity of each province.

For British Columbia, it's absolutely critical, and we recognize that it's important to work with these nations. In 2019, we made it legislation; we made it law. The law of the land is now to engage with nations, co-managed in many territories, in many parts of British Columbia. That is the way forward. We are finding that it is providing certainty not only for government, moving forward, but also for business and for industry. It's going to take time to develop those relationships. Some have that better, and with others, it will take time. It has, I think, allowed us to do a lot more. We have a lot more work to do.

In courts, nations have been winning for decades. We are reflecting that through legislation, and we also think it's the right thing to do for reconciliation, to move forward and for certainty.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now going to Mr. Leslie, who will begin the second round.

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

[*English*]

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

I'll start with the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency.

It's a bit of a big question, so feel free to come back in writing to the committee on this. You're a bit of a unique organization. You deal with probably almost all of the federal departments that touch on water, and I know there are many.

I'm curious. From an organizational standpoint, if you had the power to reform or streamline how the federal government, through those numerous departments, deals with your agency, what specifically would you recommend?

Mr. Shawn Jaques: Those are some of the things that we've thought about as well with the creation of the Canada water agency. Is there a way that you could have everything to do with water centrally located within the federal system to make it easier for not only provinces to navigate but citizens? Right now we have to contact numerous different departments to get information.

I also think that we should make sure that we have regulations that work for jurisdictions and make sure that we're not duplicating what provinces are already doing.

I don't know if you have anything else to add.

• (1610)

Mr. David Cooper: The only part I would add is that previously there were federal departments that would be able to provide funding for water projects. The PFRA obviously comes to mind and played a huge role in the development of Gardiner Dam. If that was something that could be looked at through the Canada water agency to support those types of projects, that would be very much welcomed by Saskatchewan.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you. That leads into my next question, but I'll add another one, if you wouldn't mind providing an answer in writing.

In addition to the agencies and how we could reform that, what specific regulations tend to be a hindrance or difficult to work with? Could you provide that in writing?

As you mentioned with the Canada water agency, one of the challenges we've seen is that nobody seems to really know what it's going to be. It started as PFRA 2.0. It is going to be difficult to re-establish all of this understanding of local landscapes that has been lost with the end of it.

Mr. Donnelly, you mentioned that you've had a couple of meetings with stakeholders. There seem to be a couple of meetings here and there, but nobody really knows what the core purpose of the agency is going to be.

To the best of your ability, could you explain from your perspective—and I'll go to you after, Mr. Donnelly—what you think the new water agency is going to look like? You mentioned the funding apparatus. What does that currently look like? Is this a better place to funnel money through to large projects like Lake Diefenbaker?

Mr. Shawn Jaques: Like you said, we've had some initial meetings, two or three, but we don't really have a clear understanding of exactly how it's going to be working. We've had some conversations. They talk about a funding partner and they talk about research, but we haven't had a clear understanding of what the agency is going to do.

To answer your question on the funding of projects, I do think that this is maybe an opportunity for the agency to provide funding to provinces for different types of water projects. That's one of the areas where we think they can help.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Mr. Donnelly, you mentioned a whole-of-government approach and the bringing of all stakeholders together being a vital way the B.C. government does this.

My concern is that this is going to be an Ottawa-knows-best situation. They went off, and they've come up with this idea. Then they're quietly, slowly, going to roll out what this looks like, which I think will lead to duplication. It's not going to lead to any stakeholders, provinces or anybody involved with the water management being happy.

Is that a fair assessment and a concern of yours, Mr. Donnelly?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I'll take your first question first, which is what it is going to look like. I can't answer that. I think that's up to you and up to the Government of Canada.

As far as what we hope, and I think I share some of your concerns, it will look as good as the consultation and inclusion of provinces and territories, so I think that's absolutely critical. I said in my opening remarks that the number one recommendation is increased investment. That is what British Columbia did as an early adopter of the belief that water is critical to our people, wildlife, economy and culture, to everything that we do. We are investing and we are looking for partners.

What it could do—and I do agree with Mr. Jaques about the concierge-like role that the Canada water agency could play—is ensure that there is efficiency, that there is a one-window approach and that provinces, territories and users can all go to one area to find out the best place to go—

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: —and monitoring science, etc. There are a lot of roles.

The Chair: We'll go now to Madame Chatel.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to welcome the witnesses.

Mr. Jaques, I'd like to begin by asking you a few questions about the Water Security Agency.

You said earlier that priorities had to be determined from among the various users. I'd also like to return to what your colleagues said before.

Many users are in the agricultural, industrial and mining sectors. It's also clear that what the future holds in store for us includes droughts, precipitation and other disturbances caused by climate change. We expect disputes between users to become more frequent.

How do you think the Canada Water Agency will be able to contribute to this dialogue?

Earlier on, Mr. Donnelly mentioned that the parties could be brought together for discussions and preparations. As for Saskatchewan and the role of your agency there, I'd like to know if you are planning these sorts of discussions.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Shawn Jaques: Thank you for the question.

That is exactly what the Water Security Agency is. It brings almost everything—all the water-related activities in the province—under one umbrella. We're responsible for the regulation, the licensing, the monitoring and the testing, all of those aspects.

On your question about priority, I think that is a role that we're doing already. We work with all of the users. We've had situations where, because of lack of precipitation, we've had to cut back agriculture producers on the amount of water they use, to make sure that communities have first access and get their full allocation. It's also about how we operate the structures and how we manage the systems to make sure that we have the water—that we capture it when there's an abundance of water to use when it's drier.

That is a role that our agency already plays, that kind of mediation, if you will.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Do you feel that the Canada Water Agency should mainly perform this role between the provinces?

[*English*]

Mr. Shawn Jaques: Right now, our agency is also responsible. We sit on the different jurisdictional water boards and the Prairie Provinces Water Board. We have membership on the international boards and commissions as well.

Again, our agency is representing our province in making sure that we're monitoring the waters that flow into Saskatchewan and making sure that we flow out our 50% share to Manitoba and to the United States or into Alberta and the northern watershed. That's again a function that our agency is doing.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I'd like to clarify something, but first, I'd like to hear Mr. Donnelly's and Mr. Mack's comments about that.

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Sure. Thank you for the question.

First of all, something that we've done in terms of our work in British Columbia is to recognize that the water sector has roughly around 40,000 to 60,000 jobs, which is on par with the oil and gas sector in British Columbia. It is a significant sector already. Luckily, we've done some economic reports to reflect that.

In terms of interministerial work, yes, we definitely need to have clarity of jurisdiction: federal, provincial and territorial. We treat it a little differently in British Columbia, where we have an integrated ministry. As ADM Mack mentioned, it's water, land and resource stewardship. It's a new ministry, but it's a very similar function, where we're looking at the planning, coordination and regulatory role that the ministry takes on, and it works with other ministries within our province.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: It's important, because a number of witnesses said that the Canada Water Agency should perform a leadership role in terms of coordination. However, it's equally important to know whether this would mean overlapping activities. We don't want a duplication of effort. If the provinces are properly equipped to do this work, then the Canada Water Agency ought to do something else.

I'd like to hear, briefly, what you have to say about that. Would it be a duplication of work or does the Canada Water Agency have a role to play in this?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

Who is the question for?

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I could jump in here.

The Chair: Yes.

Is it going to duplicate the work? Is the agency going to duplicate what the provinces do?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I don't think so, but to go back to Mr. Leslie's point, I think that if there isn't collaboration and work with the provinces and territories to find out what work is existing, it could cause problems. We absolutely need coordinated efforts.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

You have enough time for two short questions, Ms. Pauzé.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Do I have two minutes?

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Okay. I'll get straight to it.

Mr. Donnelly, there was a federal-provincial-territorial committee on drinking water a long time ago. The committee made recommendations on drinking water. That was over 20 years ago.

To your knowledge, did the suggestions from that committee ever become regulatory in your province of British Columbia?

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I think I'll turn to James. Twenty years ago was a little before my time.

Mr. James Mack: I would have to follow up on that. We have new reports that come from our provincial public health officer. We work with Canada around drinking-water issues. I'll be honest, though. We're working off more recent recommendations.

I'll have to check to see if those still have life after all this time.

• (1620)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Certainly, boil-water advisories for nations have come way down in British Columbia. We've addressed that as a high priority. Now our municipalities are looking at moving to tertiary in many cases, but it's certainly off primary to secondary. There has been a huge investment in water infrastructure from the nineties until now—that's over 30 years.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Is that also the case for you, Mr. Jaques?

[English]

Mr. Shawn Jaques: I would have to follow up as well, because that was 20 years ago. I wasn't there.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: So we don't know if there was opposition to the introduction of regulations.

Many people have come to meet us here at the committee. There have been citizens, researchers, non-researchers. We've been told about invasive species and watersheds.

Is citizen participation really effective in your provinces? I'm asking you because people have been getting genuinely engaged in Quebec.

[English]

The Chair: Answer very briefly, please. You have high levels of citizen consultation.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: One hundred per cent.

I think communities need to be engaged, like municipalities working with nations and industry. If they don't have a voice at the table for critical decision-making, you're going to hear about it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Collins.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To follow up on what we were talking about regarding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, can you tell us a little more about the B.C.-First Nations Water Table, what the B.C. government is doing and what we could learn at the federal level from this model?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Absolutely. Thank you for that question.

I think that was critical to where we have gotten to. We started over two years ago with a consultation and a commitment to work with nations. We produced a “what we heard” document. We produced an intentions paper. These reflect the consultations we've had—over 2,000 consultations with nations and many others—including a round table with the premier in September, and then a follow-up round table just recently.

For us in British Columbia, it is critical that we engage with nations. As a reflection of this, we created a B.C.-First Nations Water Table to look at codeveloping the strategy, which is where we're at right now. We're looking to put that strategy out. We're hearing from all sectors. That is going to be our challenge—engaging all sectors in that strategy, so they see themselves in it. Again, the water table has been critical for providing a leadership role there.

Ms. Laurel Collins: You also have a B.C. freshwater initiative, which has a goal of having all freshwater ecosystems in B.C. be in good health by 2030. Can you talk a bit about the progress on that?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I think I'm going to hand that one on progress over to James.

Mr. James Mack: First off, on fresh water, as the parliamentary secretary announced, our approach has been to work with first nations and make things community-led. We have been driving that work through a series of investments.

The first one was called the healthy watersheds initiative, which was a job creation program that we did during a strong B.C. pandemic response. It had a benefit of being a high job creator. A lot of the people who participated chose careers in restoration, and it had an added benefit of healthier watersheds in B.C., so—

The Chair: Unfortunately, we have to stop there, but if you have any comments you want to give the committee in writing to complete your response, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Mazier, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming out this afternoon.

My questions are for the Water Security Agency. You mentioned that maintaining provincial authority over water management is a key priority for Saskatchewan. Can you expand on this and why it's important to your province?

Mr. Shawn Jaques: Thank you for the question. I think it's very much along the lines of what I mentioned earlier. We have those relationships with the communities, the industry and the stakeholders in our province. As I said earlier, we're the agency that regulates all aspects of water: drinking water, waste water and licensing. I believe it's important that our agency and our province maintain juris-

diction over that right. I don't see a need to duplicate those services that we're already providing.

• (1625)

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thanks.

My next question is about duplication. I've been hearing lots from many witnesses here about the potential that duplication has. We've seen lots of duplication of other water acts and other water legislation. I'm from Manitoba. I live at the bottom of a watershed, so thank you very much, Saskatchewan, for your water. We've been quite frustrated many times in Manitoba, but 2011 was kind of an eye-opening experience for us.

It was interesting listening to the governments at that time. They were saying they should have done something after the 2008 flood, and meanwhile, three years later, in that year, they actually might not have flooded out. It was terrible down there. What it came down to was a mismanagement of the government legislation.

Out of all this talk, out of all the studies and all this stuff, is there any advice you can give this committee when we're writing up these reports? What needs to be done to make sure that these good thoughts and good intentions are actually followed? We can talk about consultations, all the good intentions and that we need to have communities there, but far too often they're not listened to and they're not acted on. If we simply followed the regulations, things would be a lot better. I don't know if you have any advice on that.

Mr. David Cooper: Thank you. It's a great question. The one thing that I've noticed with water management is that it can, at times, be reactive to the scenario of the day. When you're in a period of drought, the focus can be looking towards increasing storage and that sort of thing—not that it shouldn't; it should. In terms of handling those events that occurred in 2011 and others, I agree. I think we do need to work with our communities, our neighbours and our neighbouring provinces in creating proactive opportunities to mitigate those things.

I know from talking to our folks who worked through those floods that they left a mark. They really did. I think those concerns remain. I don't know if I have a great answer to the question other than to say I think it's certainly noted. Those are things that, through our infrastructure group, we are looking at opportunities to better manage our water all the time. As Shawn mentioned, we do look at operating our structures in a way that provides the best benefit. In certain years, it is flood mitigation. Right now, we're more focused on storage.

I don't know, Shawn, if you have anything to add to this, but Lake Diefenbaker and the Gardiner Dam is the largest water management structure that we have. We recently reviewed our operating plan looking at whether we are doing this to the best of our ability. We are doing things, but I think the point is well taken. There's certainly more to do in that category.

Mr. Shawn Jaques: I would just add that I think it's that constant communication and making sure we're working with our neighbours. I know we have a good working relationship with our two neighbouring provinces. We have a memorandum of understanding with Manitoba on water management issues. We work closely with the Government of Alberta on issues as well. As well, there are the international river systems and watersheds. I think it's also important to make sure that we have that information sharing and that we're working together as jurisdictions.

Mr. Dan Mazier: For the water agency, how much have you had? From my understanding, you really still don't have a clear sense of the direction it's headed. Is that correct? I know we and Mr. Donnelly have talked about the funding, as have you guys. It always seems like we have these partnerships, so if the province brings some and the feds bring some, then we have a project. We might have some private stuff going on too, but therein lies the problem. I think it's too much like the old system.

I would implore all of you to share any words of advice you have for this committee and for this study. If we're going to develop a water agency and spend a pile of numbers on just coordinating a bunch of people and, if there's some legislation that needs to be looked at, especially when it comes down to interjurisdictional and national boundaries, please table them with our committee so we can get them in the report.

The Chair: Please do that.

I think what you're talking about is the revision of the Canada Water Act.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Whatever it takes....

The Chair: We'll see.

Mr. Longfield, you have five minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I really enjoy your musings. Sometimes those little points are key to our study, so thanks for putting your two cents into the discussion as well, Chair.

Mr. Donnelly, it's really good to see you back in Ottawa. Congratulations on the great work you're doing in B.C.

You mentioned in your testimony something about air. Something we haven't really considered in this study is the air impacts on water. Also, I'm thinking of Go Home Bay in Georgian Bay, which is up to 70°F already this year. We have temperature effects on water that affect biodiversity. You mentioned how salmon like cold water. Trying to find cold water right now is a challenge.

Could you maybe talk about the importance of clean technology and clean technology investment in things other than water that impact the water?

• (1630)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: It's great to be back here. It feels a little funny after five years to come back and see so many familiar faces, which is really nice.

In clean-tech innovation, there are many sectors that are rising to the challenge to look at how they can reduce their impacts and provide less of a footprint on watersheds and the water supply. I think many industries are responding to that. That's what is needed, and that's what it's going to take, because we have a challenge. We're getting less water off glaciers. They are receding. We're having a problem with water storage. In British Columbia, we've had issues with forestry management, so retaining that water on the landscape is even more challenging. Municipalities are letting us know that. It's becoming a public safety issue. These are compounding pressures.

Luckily, we've had a good response, not just from clean tech but from many industries in B.C. that are saying they recognize the importance of water and want to be part of the solution. They are coming to the table with how they can make a difference. At times, it's going to require investment from the government as well.

We are collaborating and working together. The clearest one, for me, is in the agriculture community. They're looking at storage issues and innovation and technology. Clean tech will drive agriculture technology.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I think we see that in Guelph as well with precision agriculture and what's been going on there.

In terms of pollution, heat is also pollution. It's also waste for industry. Both sides of that equation need to focus on reducing heat loss, reducing heat waste.

On the net-zero accelerator fund we have in place to try to drive some of this innovation, there's \$8 billion going into that fund, which is critical for Canada to meet its climate change goals. However, it also has an impact on water.

Is there anything else around that we might include in our study in terms of air impact or heat impact on water?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I'm going to ask James if he has others to add, but I would add that considering and looking at waste as an opportunity is absolutely critical—or looking at what we have been calling waste. That is a new opportunity for municipalities and regional districts. I know that's happening in British Columbia. Our government is doing that through our CleanBC strategy. These are opportunities to help the economy turn around. I think we're doing a good job, but we could obviously do better in looking at partners.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I'm running out of time, but I'll go over to Mr. Jaques. On agriculture, something that agriculture and the farm community have really picked up on is beneficial management practice—looking at things that will help with water, with climate change and biodiversity.

Can you comment on the importance of clean technology in those fields?

Mr. Shawn Jaques: I go back to my opening comments where I've commented that with irrigation we're producing more food on the same land mass. There are going to be lower emissions.

I'd also comment that we're seeing producers already adopt technology not only in dryland farming but on irrigation, where they're making sure that they're only putting the right amount of water when needed—

• (1635)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The four Rs...

Mr. Shawn Jaques: —through a subsurface drip so they're not overutilizing water. We're seeing producers investing in those technologies.

The Chair: We're going to have to stop there.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you so much.

The Chair: I really want to thank the witnesses for being here in person to offer their insights.

We're going to have a very short break. We don't have any onboarding to do online, but we need to change the panel. I'll just break for a couple of minutes.

Thanks, again. It was nice to see you, Mr. Donnelly.

It was also nice to see you again, Mr. Jaques, Mr. Cooper and Mr. Mack. Thanks, again.

We'll break for just a second.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Dear colleagues, we are resuming the meeting.

We don't want to waste any time. We want to finish on time today. We have a total of three hours for the meeting.

In this second group of witnesses, we have a representative from the Government of Prince Edward Island, Mr. Sean Ledgerwood, who is the acting manager, water and air monitoring, in the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

We also have a representative from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Haseen Khan, the director of the water resource management division of the Department of Environment and Climate Change.

Without further ado, gentlemen, we'll begin.

You will each have a maximum of five minutes for your address.

Mr. Ledgerwood, please go ahead.

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood (Acting Manager, Water and Air Monitoring, Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, Government of Prince Edward Island): Thank you for the

opportunity to discuss freshwater resources and how our small island province is relying upon the resource.

As a province, we're 100% reliant on groundwater to supply our drinking water. All of our water is extracted from water wells. We also extract water from rivers for agricultural irrigation, but even in this case, there's an important link to groundwater. In the summer, the base flow from rivers can be almost entirely fed from groundwater.

With ever-increasing demands and threats to our water, we're striving to understand and address the issues. We're discovering that droughts can affect water availability at times of high demand. We are seeing more anoxic events in our waters. They are occurring earlier and they are lasting longer. We're also noticing that incidents of saltwater intrusion in our wells are becoming more common.

Because of this, we've been very active in trying to protect our valuable resource. In 2021, the P.E.I. Water Act was proclaimed, which provides the foundation for water and waste-water management in P.E.I. We are providing government with the tools necessary to mitigate issues and employ protection of the resource.

While the development of regulations is far from complete, several regulations, such as water withdrawal regulations and the drinking water supply and waste-water systems regulations, provide mechanisms for government to properly manage water.

Agriculture is a critical industry for the province and there are increasing demands for water for irrigation. Water is extracted from both wells and from rivers for irrigation. However, we've been trying to move away from river withdrawals, as groundwater extraction through a well can have a less immediate impact on the river in a watershed than the instantaneous impact that comes from surface-water extraction.

We have also instituted a requirement for all major water users to create drought contingency plans, where the users provide written plans for what they will do to reduce water usage during drought conditions.

Water permitting on P.E.I. is done on a watershed-by-watershed basis. Water extraction is to only occur up until the threshold deemed harmful to freshwater aquatic life is reached. While most watersheds in P.E.I. are not near water extraction limits, there are some watersheds where demand is approaching allocation limits.

Our department has always been a proponent of transparent monitoring, as we use much of this data to determine how best to protect our water resources. As a requirement of the new Water Act, we have created the P.E.I. water registry. I encourage each one of you to look at that and discover all it has to offer.

For our drinking water users, we have instituted several protection measures. For example, we offer drinking water analysis to the public for free. We're in the planning stage of the development of well-field protection regulations for our municipal systems.

We have long believed that protection and decision-making at a local level is an integral part of environmental protection. For example, we have the P.E.I. watershed groups on the island. With the Water Act, we hope we can expand governance at a local level to include water allocation decisions.

We consider the continued collaboration between the provincial and federal governments as a key part of protecting our water resource. A very successful example of this is the Canada-P.E.I. memorandum of agreement on water. Within this agreement, we've been able to partner and share resources with the federal government on a range of initiatives, such as water quality and water quantity monitoring, CABIN monitoring, pesticide monitoring, CE-SI, shellfish water classification program and, for the past two years, an expanded pesticide monitoring program with PMRA.

It is crucial that collaboration such as this and continued funding for water and waste-water systems continue, especially with the population growth we've seen. These models have served both governments very well in the past.

As I mentioned, agriculture is a critical industry for P.E.I. The federal government can support producers in their continued goal of reducing impacts to the environment. This can come in the form of research, education, collaboration with local watershed groups and monitoring in the following areas: reduction in the use and impact of fertilizers; reduction of soil loss and improved soil health; the use of pesticides best suited for P.E.I.'s unique environment; and pest- and drought-resistant crops.

There is widespread use of pesticide products within P.E.I. and PMRA should be reviewing registrations with a P.E.I. lens to ensure that they are safe to use with our unique environmental conditions. They have run an expanded pilot program across Canada in the last two years. We support the expansion of this program to fully understand the fate of these chemicals.

As emerging contaminants such as PFAS become an issue, there's often little known about them. The federal government can again assist with sampling costs, research and setting guideline values.

Governance at a local level is important and the federal government should continue to expand support for local groups, such as watershed groups on P.E.I. This support can include financial, research and sharing scientific expertise.

I hope I was able to provide you with a quick overview of the island's unique environment and the need for support on a variety of water-related issues.

• (1640)

Thank you for your valuable time.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ledgerwood.

Before giving the floor to Mr. Kahn, I'd like to know whether there is a vote in the House, because I saw flashing lights.

An hon. member: They're asking for a quorum in the House.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Kahn.

[English]

Mr. Haseen Khan (Director, Water Resources Management Division, Department of Environment and Climate Change, Government of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador): I would like to begin by thanking the chair and honourable members for inviting the Department of Environment and Climate Change of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to appear before this committee to share our experience with fresh water.

Water is embedded inside everything we consume or manufacture, and it is the essence of life itself. Water has a spiritual significance for indigenous people and is a vehicle for the economic development of our communities. Water is a shared natural resource that crosses jurisdictional, geographical and political boundaries.

The key pillars for the effective management of water resources are water monitoring and reporting, prediction and forecasting, regulatory oversight, additional innovation, research and development, and coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders.

Water management within Canada and its respective jurisdictions is facing many complex and challenging issues that require a robust and collaborative strategy. One of the main drivers for this is the impact of climate change on water resources, amplifying the ever-changing natural dynamics of water.

The cornerstone of Newfoundland and Labrador's water management philosophy is that you cannot manage what you cannot measure.

The most visible impacts of climate change in Canada are on water: more frequent and severe floods; droughts; storms; sea level rise; reduced sea-ice coverage and duration, which is having a serious impact on our northern communities and their lifestyle; and less snowpack.

Canada's water infrastructure, including water and waste-water treatment plants, dams, dikes and levees, is aging. Appropriate measures are needed to upgrade or replace aging infrastructure to ensure public and environmental safety associated with climate change-related events.

Significant progress has been made since 2001 in the area of clean, safe and secure drinking water. However, small rural communities, especially northern communities, are still struggling to provide this necessity of life. The provision of clean and safe drinking water requires not only technical and financial capacity but human operational capacity and teamwork among all stakeholders. The integration of traditional knowledge with science and respect for water into water management policies is essential for all levels of government.

A comprehensive approach to the federal water stewardship is required, with less fragmentation of responsibility for water nationally. A modernized Canada Water Act should capture key themes of ecosystem-based management, stakeholder engagement, adoptive governance, additional innovation, research and development, and science-based and traditional knowledge-based decision-making, risk management, cross-sectoral collaboration and policy coherence.

There are huge gaps in coverage in existing monitoring networks, especially in the northern parts of the country where the climate change impacts are more pronounced and where, in many cases, the current climate has already departed from historical norms.

• (1645)

The Chair: We're going to have to stop there, Mr. Khan, but I'm sure there will be many questions, so you'll be able to share your remaining ideas in response to questions.

We'll go to Mr. Mazier for six minutes. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming out today.

I'm going to focus on Mr. Ledgerwood first of all and talk about the alternate land-use program.

We spoke briefly just outside here before this committee meeting, and you were right. The idea for the pilot, ALUS, was all thought of in Manitoba and tested in Manitoba, right in my riding actually, by Shoal Lake, so it was good. P.E.I., fortunately, picked it up and is embracing the whole model.

The key idea around ALUS, the alternative land-use service, was something very unique and very foreign, and that was to involve the landowners.

I'd like you to expand on that. How did the legend or the path of ALUS develop in P.E.I.? What are you finding good about it and where can we improve on it? It's one program that I think we can really leverage in the future, as a water committee, and I think we need to hear that.

• (1650)

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: Thanks. That's a great question.

I can talk at a high level on that, because I'm not involved in the program at the finer levels. It's been an incredibly great program for P.E.I. You're right—it was a little bit novel and it took a little bit of convincing to get the public to get into the idea of paying farmers or agricultural producers to do something. Some people might say that they should be doing it already. However, it's a hurdle that we got over and it's been incredibly successful.

It's ongoing now. It's improving our environment, and we hope programs such as that and especially new ideas like that continue. That's always very important.

I don't know if I answered your question, but I would just note that it's been very successful in P.E.I., and we continue to use that program.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I think the key message is that you do acknowledge as well, as I understand it, that it involves having the landowners at the table to make those decisions and decide where the water should be stored. They're the managers. They know best what's going on in the landscape, and it actually comes down to savings. It's the best thing to do for society and for the landscape, but it's also the most efficient thing to do when it comes to money and that type of approach.

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: I agree. I mentioned in my notes that governance at a local level is very important to us in all respects, especially with respect to water allocation, as I pointed out. You may look at our province, which is obviously the smallest, and think the province itself is local, but we want to operate on a watershed basis. When you get down to that really fine local level, you can have really good decisions, even in a small province like ours, and come up with points that the government might not have thought of.

Governance and collaboration at this very local-level watershed, as a basis, are very important, and we hope to continue that with respect to a whole bunch of different aspects.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Okay. Thank you.

Now we'll switch gears here and talk about the Canada water agency. Has P.E.I. been consulted on the Canada water agency?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: We have but only through committees, I believe. We've been consulted on the Canada Water Act, but I don't know very much about the agency yet. There have been just a few things within some committees I've been in. I was very interested to hear, just before my presentation, the water agency talking a little bit about where they plan to go. I'm very interested in that.

At our level, we're an island, literally, so we don't have trans-boundary water issues. I was hearing a little while ago about how that might be a big portion of what they're talking about. We'd be asking more about how we could partner for programs and that sort of thing.

I don't know if that answers your question.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I does, kind of—so they're not really consulting you. Are you the person they would contact in the province?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: Yes, eventually it would get to me.

Mr. Dan Mazier: It would eventually. Okay.

Mr. Khan, have they talked to Newfoundland at all about the Canada water agency?

Mr. Haseen Khan: Yes, we have talked. We have had a number of conference calls, and we provided comments during those conference calls. As well, we provided written comments on what types of issues and challenges there are, based on our experience, and how those issues or challenges should be addressed within this new agency.

Mr. Dan Mazier: This has been going on for a couple of years now—the engagement process. I was getting at that during the previous panel as well. We can talk. The government is notorious for talking. When it comes down to the rubber hitting the road and people getting flooded out or droughted out, however, it doesn't work. We'll have some more committee meetings or something like that. This is the caution we're talking about when we develop another agency with another layer of bureaucracy.

Did the federal government address that at all, when they were talking about the water agency? Did they say, "This is going to be much better", or was it all, "Here, you're going to have a central place for your funds"?

• (1655)

Mr. Haseen Khan: If I recall correctly, the thrust of those discussions was on being a water manager involved in day-to-day water management issues in your jurisdiction. What is your experience in your dealings with various federal agencies? What is your opinion on how water should be governed on a long-term basis in Canada to ensure socio-economic benefit for the public as well as public safety?

The Chair: Thank you. We'll have to stop there.

Ms. Taylor Roy.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. This is a very interesting conversation on how we manage water resources across the country.

You mentioned that climate change has a huge impact on water and water management, and that how we manage our water also has an impact on climate change. It goes both ways. One of the areas I want to explore is how climate change is not within one province—whether it's P.E.I., Newfoundland or any other. We know it's national and global.

How do you see this water agency working with the provinces to discuss some of these larger issues in terms of how we work on climate change and water management from wetlands to the individual watershed areas? How can we bring that together to try to ensure the effects of water management also help us in our fight against climate change?

Mr. Haseen Khan: Thank you very much.

It's a very interesting and relevant question. I think there are a number of aspects.

The first is that consolidating the fragmented governance of water within the federal government under one agency, the Canada

water agency, would be a very positive step. Then provinces would have a one-stop shop. They'd know where to go. They would bring all their issues and concerns to that particular agency, rather than to four or five departments.

Another aspect is that the federal government administers a number of cost-share and work-share agreements with provinces and territories, but these are within different departments. If all of that can be consolidated in one shop, I think it will lead to efficiency. It will avoid duplication. I'm sure it will lead to better long-term governance of water for the benefit of Canadians.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you.

Mr. Ledgerwood, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: That's a great response, Haseen. I agree with that.

As I said, we're a smaller jurisdiction, so we talk among departments very quickly. We have a very good net-zero program in our department to fight climate change.

I think Haseen is right. If we can understand where to go and how that's going to relate back, it makes it a lot easier for us. The federal government is very big compared with the P.E.I. government, so it's very hard to navigate that sometimes. Making that easier for provinces, I think, is a good idea.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: You see the Canada water agency as increasing efficiency and avoiding duplication, in fact, for the provinces that are going to be working with it.

There was another thing you mentioned, Mr. Ledgerwood, earlier. You were talking about PFAS, for example, contamination, fertilizers, pesticides and the impact of these things on water safety and water quality.

How do you think the Canada water agency can play a role in ensuring some of the smaller provinces have the same research and resources as others do?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: Thank you for the great comment and the great question. Yes, that's very important to us.

As I said before, we're a hundred per cent reliant on our groundwater, so it is of utmost importance for us to keep that clean and free from contamination. When we get into issues—you mentioned PFAS and emerging chemicals—that's where our knowledge can be greatly enhanced with an organization that has the backing behind it, the strong research that the federal government quite often does, and with the knowledge of health limits and all that sort of thing coming together.

That expertise can be a great help for a province like ours, where we may not have that direct knowledge of something new.

• (1700)

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Earlier, we had the Water Security Agency from Saskatchewan here, and we were talking about a number of issues. One of the things, I think, which I read about, was that on the Lake Diefenbaker dam reservoir expansion, some indigenous leaders felt that the federal government should have a role in water management, because, of course, indigenous affairs are a federal responsibility.

They're so impacted, especially as we were talking about, Mr. Khan, in the northern part of Labrador, for example, and in other areas.

How do you think the Canada water agency will help in the reconciliation and co-operation between the indigenous rights and what they're looking for with regard to water management and some of the provincial and territorial issues?

Mr. Haseen Khan: Thank you very much.

I think we have to take a step backward.

Historically, the federal government has played a strong leadership role in facilitating the monitoring and reporting of water in the country. Providing a centralized repository for all water-related data that is being collected all across the country and using that data to develop policies and guidelines for the governance of water—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Haseen Khan: —I think are the areas where the Canada water agency can play a very important role.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We'll stop now.

Thank you, Ms. Taylor Roy.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Pauzé, the floor is yours.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for being here with us today.

I understand that the Canada Water Agency is an organization that might be important to your respective provinces, insofar as there is no duplication with what already exists in your province.

Are there any major freshwater management problems in Canada, other than the federal government's absence of, or inadequate, coordination?

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: Go ahead.

Mr. Haseen Khan: I think one of the areas where we have seen issues and gaps with climate change is in the gaps in our monitoring network—that is, the water quantity monitoring network, the water quality monitoring network, the groundwater monitoring network and the climate monitoring network, especially in northern areas, where the climate change impact is more pronounced. That is where I think the federal government can play a very important role to fill in those gaps under various ongoing cost-share and work-share programs.

Another important role the federal government can play is to provide national guidance on how the data that we are collecting can be converted into information, into knowledge products, that would be of interest and benefit to common Canadians.

I will give you an example. In 2000, as a part of our work, the federal government and all provincial and territorial jurisdictions,

under the umbrella of the CCME, the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, developed a tool that is a communication tool on the water quality index—that is, how this water quality data can be communicated to the public.

The public is not concerned about that data. Here is what they want to know: Is my river good for swimming? Is my river good for fishing? Is this water good for drinking? If we can provide that type of information to Canadians, I think we will be doing great justice to ourselves and to our mandate.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Ledgerwood, would you like to add anything?

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: Just to follow up on Haseen's comments, with P.E.I., I've mentioned a little bit about pesticides. There's a large use of pesticides in P.E.I., and one of the things that we'd like to see is, when the pesticides are registered by PMRA, to really look at the unique situation P.E.I. has. When they register products, it's not always a one-size-fits-all. P.E.I. is very dependent on the groundwater and has different types of soils. It's very unique. That's one thing I'd like to see moved a little bit more to a more specific basis, based on the type of environment we have.

I would agree with most of Haseen's comments. Just to follow up, we've been trying with our water registry to do exactly what Haseen was asking, to create data in a form people can understand. Just raw lines and lines of data doesn't really mean anything to most people, but when you put it in an indicator or that sort of thing, it can be very useful to the public.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: So what you're saying is that the sharing and exchange of data gathered by the provinces and the government are anything but optimal, in spite of the quality and quantity of data.

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: Could you expand on that a touch? I'm not exactly sure what you mean.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: And I understand from your answer to my first question that the federal government is not sending you enough data, or at least not sending it quickly enough. So there's not enough data sharing.

I have another question, for both of you.

In your respective provinces, what water infrastructure problems are of the greatest concern at the moment?

[English]

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: For us, it's aging infrastructure with waste-water and drinking water facilities. There are a lot of facilities out there that are aging, and we need more funding to get them up to date, including for climate change. As you build new facilities and infrastructure, climate change has to be part of it. A lot of our infrastructure is aging, as I said, so that would be an opportunity for a lot more funding to get those up to the level of newer facilities, I guess.

Mr. Haseen Khan: To your first question on the exchange of data. I think the data is there, and we have a very good system where-by data is collected on a real-time basis and shared on a real-time basis, so that's a very positive step and improvement. As I mentioned earlier, our challenge is that there are gaps in certain parts of the country, especially in northern areas, and those gaps need to be addressed. Wherever we have a monitoring network, they are working excellently and providing information.

The Chair: Thank you. We're going to go to Ms. Collins now.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here.

Both the federal and provincial governments have a responsibility to ensure that first nations communities, Inuit communities and Métis communities have access to clean drinking water. I would like to hear from both of you, maybe starting with Mr. Khan, what your government is doing, what the landscape is when it comes to access to clean drinking water, what communities might not have access to clean drinking water and what the government is doing to ensure that those communities get access.

Mr. Haseen Khan: The provision of clean and safe drinking water—and our honourable member also asked this question earlier—requires a multibarrier approach. One-size-fits-all does not work. You have to have the concept of multibarrier. This was one of the outcomes of that national committee that was created 20 years ago. I was one of the co-chairs of that committee. We promoted the implementation of a multibarrier concept all across the country for all public water supplies, and that has been embraced and implemented.

You have multiple barriers, and if one barrier fails, there are other barriers to protect the safety of drinking water. In our province, we have so far rolled out two clean, safe and secure drinking water action plans. Those action plans have certain targets, certain indicators. We have produced an annual report on how we are performing and making progress.

• (1710)

Ms. Laurel Collins: Can you share a little bit about the kind of trajectory and what kind of progress you have made?

Mr. Haseen Khan: Yes. We have reduced the number of boil-water advisories from 350 to 170. That is substantial progress. We have increased the number of trained operators from 80 to 350, and we are proud of that. We have increased the number of water treatment plants from five to 25, so we have made progress in each and every area.

The most important thing we have done is to put all drinking water quality data in the public domain. Any member of the public,

anywhere in the country, can go to our web page, select the particular community, see the quality of drinking water in that particular community and see if their community on a boil-water advisory.

I think that during last 20 to 25 years, we have made substantial progress, but still there is lots of work to be done, especially in the small rural communities and the northern communities. We maintain a very good working relationship with our indigenous communities. We offer all those programs to those communities that we offer to non-indigenous communities.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you.

Mr. Ledgerwood, do you have any comments?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: Thank you.

The landscape in P.E.I. is.... There are not very large indigenous communities, so they're very small and it's a federal jurisdiction, as you know. However, because we're small, we also collaborate with those communities whenever they want. If they need expertise from our department, we just talk and collaborate as need be.

What we do to protect them individually, I don't know that it's focused on any one group, but as a whole, for the province, the Water Act, as I said, is just relatively new. That's going to give us more powers to ensure that our drinking water is clean for every resident.

Ms. Laurel Collins: I don't know much about the landscape in P.E.I. Are there boil-water advisories? Do the Mi'kmaq people in P.E.I. have access to clean drinking water across Prince Edward Island?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: I would say the whole province has good drinking water and good access to it. Are there boil-water advisories? There are some but not that many. We don't rely on surface water, so it's all groundwater fed. Most of the time.... There would have to be a problem with the system in order to have a boil-water advisory.

Ms. Laurel Collins: I guess maybe that leads into my next question about emergency management and disaster response. Both of you spoke a little bit about the impacts of climate change and the threats that communities face.

Can you tell us what you want to see from the federal government when it comes to emergency response, threats to our watersheds due to climate change and how the federal government could better support provinces and municipalities when it comes to these issues?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: Okay. I will go first.

I think in our position, as I already mentioned, with the infrastructure we have for waste-water and for drinking water systems, more funding to upgrade those and to make them newer would be the main thing.

I forget the first part of your question. I'm sorry.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Really, it's just about what you want from the federal government when it comes to ensuring that our communities are climate-resilient. What response do you want from the federal government when there are these kinds of climate-related natural disasters, whether that's hurricanes, wildfires, drought or flooding?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: Yes. We certainly know hurricanes after Fiona. That was a big wake-up call for the province.

I think it still comes back to infrastructure for us. We have a climate change section that is really aggressive on the adaptation side, and we have been working very hard to make sure that we adapt to climate change. Part of that is the infrastructure. Part of that is emergency programs and that sort of thing. Additional funding, additional research and expertise....

[Translation]

The Chair: We've taken note of your infrastructure requirements.

We are now moving on to the second round of questions, but I'm going to reduce the amount of time allowed for questions and answers; it will be four minutes and two minutes. We have another hour left following the current discussion with witnesses.

Mr. Leslie, go ahead for four minutes.

• (1715)

[English]

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

I would like to start with you, Mr. Ledgerwood, regarding some comments you made earlier. You mentioned that the groundwater is the source of water and that you have good drinking water in the province, but you seemed to allude to a concern over some sort of contamination by crop protection products used by farmers. You suggested that the PMRA should perhaps consider delineating between the rest of the country and P.E.I. users of products that are marked and used properly on label.

I just want to clarify. Do you think that P.E.I. farmers, whether they be grain farmers, who I think are in town today to advocate for availability of tools, or whether they be potato farmers, should have reduced access to crop protection products that PMRA approves?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: Definitely not. Agriculture industry is critical to our province, like I said before. All I'm saying is that I want to make sure that the products they are using are unique and properly registered for our province. That's all. I'm not saying we should reduce or cut anything back. It's more about having the right products for the right circumstances.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I trust that farmers are choosing that correctly.

Going back to the Canada water agency, thus far, it seems like the Canada water agency might be everything to everybody all at the same time, and I'm very skeptical that this is going to be the case.

Mr. Khan, you mentioned water quantity as one of the things. That seems novel to me. We've seen a lot about quality, monitoring and data collection and standardization, which all sound lovely, but very little on water quantity and flows, which is certainly within provincial jurisdiction for the most part. I'm curious.

From your several conference calls and your lack of calls, what do you actually think the Canada water agency, if put out today, is going to be?

Mr. Haseen Khan: I think the Canada water agency can play a very important role in rolling out national policy guidance in various areas. That could be water quantity monitoring, water quality monitoring, flood risk mapping or other areas. They can carry multiple heads. They can be a one-stop shop for provinces. They can provide national policy guidance on various issues. They can coordinate these various federal-provincial cost-share and work-share programs. I think they can play the role of a centralized agency, a consolidated water agency, for the various water-related functions within the federal government.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I hope that ends up being something like what it might end up being.

I'll move back to Mr. Ledgerwood.

Smaller municipalities often don't have the capacity or the funding to pay for a lot of the environmental studies that lead to core infrastructure projects or water management projects. I assume smaller municipalities...and you mentioned that sometimes at the local governance level within P.E.I.

In my riding, we have a municipality that paid thousands of dollars for a study to look at a climate adaptation project that would mitigate overland flooding, which is a high likelihood, and it was denied without really any understanding. Now they have some cold feet about further applications because these small municipalities have to pay thousands and tens of thousands of dollars to get that initial application in for a project approval. I'm curious as to whether or not you believe overall there's adequate support and, how, as a smaller province with smaller municipalities, you can try to help guide them through this difficult process.

The Chair: We have about 15 seconds, but then you can always answer the question at another opportunity.

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: Yes, it is a challenge. We've been trying to work with some of that. You talked about inland flooding, and we just created a map for all of P.E.I. for inland flooding, so some of that work hopefully can help municipalities in their work. However, yes, it is a challenge and additional funding could help municipalities in that sort of thing.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Please go ahead, Ms. Chatel.

[English]

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

The Canada water agency is really looking at three main objectives. It touched on several points you raised, but I wanted to give you the opportunity to tell the committee what they should be prioritizing that would be most helpful for provinces in managing water.

The one we talked about—Mr. Khan, you referred to it—is that they're looking at being more of a one-stop shop because there are several departments dealing with water. They want to regroup to have a whole-of-government approach. They wanted to make it easier for decision-makers and Canadians to find federal resources on fresh water.

The second category is more collaboration with provinces and territories, with the U.S. as well and with indigenous.

The third one is really about science and data. They wanted to leverage freshwater science and data; improve the program; report regularly all across Canada with the quality, quantity, availability and use of water in Canada; and develop a national freshwater data strategy that would enhance the use of data and the quality of data, which they want to do with all key partners.

In your mind, where would be the best use of the resources of the Canada water agency in those broad categories?

• (1720)

Mr. Haseen Khan: I think the Canada water agency should focus in those areas where provinces are not working, because provinces have very strong expertise in water management. They are dealing with floods, dam safety, and clean and safe water.

The Canada water agency can play the role of an overarching agency to act as a technical resource for the provinces on research and development and innovation, and the development of tools that we can use to transform and convert the data we are collecting into information and knowledge that are of interest to Canadians and that Canadians need on a day-to-day basis. They can be a driving force or central clearing house for all those types of work.

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: I would agree with Haseen. It's the scientific knowledge that could be of very great benefit to smaller jurisdictions. That would be one thing.

It would be good for collaboration on policies at a national level, which is bigger than at the provincial level. I think those are the two main parts that I see.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Is their role to collect the best practices out there? I'm not asking only about Canada, because we are international partners participating in the OECD forum, the UN forum and the World Bank forum. Everybody is talking about climate change and the importance of water, so finding, identifying, applying and suggesting best practices in various fields.... Agriculture is one of them.

Do you think that would be a role to play?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: It could be—it's going to be different in different regions of the country—just so as long as it's specific to the province they're talking about at the time. Agriculture in the Prairies is not the same as agriculture in P.E.I., so it has to be based on the specific—

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Pauzé, you have two minutes.

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

Mr. Ledgerwood, you are no doubt familiar with the federal-provincial-territorial committee on drinking water, which issued its recommendations in 2024.

Do you agree with these recommendations? Do you intend to introduce regulations to achieve the objectives of these recommendations?

[English]

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: We take any recommendations seriously. We would look at them and see if they fit our unique situation. I don't know if there is a broad answer for that, but we would look at any recommendations and see if we can incorporate them or not.

Does that answer your question?

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'd like to know what your priorities are.

I asked a question about infrastructure earlier. As we know, everything is connected. Is coming up with better regulations a priority for you? Is protecting biodiversity one of your priorities?

Mr. Khan could answer my question, if he wishes.

• (1725)

[English]

Mr. Haseen Khan: I think our first priority, speaking from a Newfoundland and Labrador perspective, is to address the gaps in data and in monitoring networks, because they provide the basis for whatever work we do, whether we develop policies, best management practices or standard operating protocols. I think that is the first action. We would like to have monitoring networks providing coverage to all parts of the country.

Once that has been done, we would certainly like to see how we can develop best management practices and tools, such as flood risk management, to respond and adapt to climate change.

I would say the first priority is data, the second priority is policies and the third priority is to work as a team.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Pauzé.

[English]

Ms. Idlout, welcome to the committee. You have two minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Qujannamiik, Iksivautaq.* Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for sharing information with us.

I would like to ask both witnesses to respond here. How are the effects of climate change, such as flood risks, considered when dealing with waste water? For example, during the 2013 Calgary floods, raw sewage ended up in the Bow River because the wastewater plant was flooded. Calgary has an incredible water treatment and waste-water plant, but disasters still happen.

What are your provinces doing to prepare for such disasters?

Mr. Haseen Khan: What we are doing is that, for all infrastructures that are designed now and that come for regulatory approval, we make sure that the climate change lens has been incorporated into the design of those infrastructures. That is the first thing we are doing. As you mentioned, we have learned from experience that the infrastructures designed and built 30 or 40 years ago did not take climate change into consideration. That's why in many of our communities those infrastructures are failing.

It's a two-stage process. First, on the infrastructure that is already there, we have to upgrade that slowly and gradually to meet climate change conditions. Any new infrastructure that we consider for approval should be in compliance with climate change conditions.

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: We're much like Newfoundland and kind of in the same boat. Every decision we make and everything we build now has a climate change lens. We have climate change, sort of, mini-experts in all our departments across the government. We're incorporating that now, just like Haseen said.

The Chair: Thanks very much. That's good.

Mr. Kram, you have four minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Kram: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us today.

I've often wondered about this. Provinces like Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland are surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean and therefore have unlimited access to water, except it's salt water. Have either of your provincial governments ever studied the possibility of desalination facilities to acquire drinking water and other uses of water from the ocean so that changes in river flows in any one year don't make that much difference?

Is that something that has ever been studied in any great depth?

Mr. Haseen Khan: The cost of converting sea-water into acceptable drinking water is very high. Our focus is to make use of our freshwater resources.

But yes, we have been considering the impact, especially, as you said, since 70% of our population lives in coastal areas. With climate change, the sea level is rising. We have been considering how that rise in sea level is impacting our groundwater wells, which are being used as a source of drinking water in coastal communities, because that raises the issue of saltwater intrusion. We are trying to develop policies so that we can optimize the pumpage of water in order to minimize the pumpage of salt water into those wells.

This is an aspect that has been looked into and that has been both modelled as well as monitored, but we have not looked into using sea-water as a source of drinking water for cost-benefit reasons.

• (1730)

Mr. Michael Kram: Mr. Ledgerwood.

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: We haven't focused, or not that I'm aware of, on saltwater desalination. We have a very plentiful aquifer, and our priority is to protect that aquifer. We have quite a bit of water. It's not limitless, but at this point we have a good quantity that serves the needs of the islanders. Our focus is on protecting that and not so much about desalination, at this point.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay.

The committee has discussed at length a possible future mandate for the Canada water agency. One of the proposals that has come up is a cost-sharing model for major infrastructure projects. We had witnesses before from Saskatchewan to talk about the Lake Diefenbaker project.

Are there similar major projects on the drawing board in your provinces that could benefit from this cost-sharing model?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: I don't think there's anything major. You talk about a large, large scale. That wouldn't be our scale at all. As I've harped on several times already, we'd like to upgrade our aging infrastructure. That's where we see the most benefit right now.

Mr. Haseen Khan: [*Inaudible—Editor*] in two categories.

One is the infrastructure upgrades or rehabilitation. For that, cost-share programs would be highly beneficial. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, our infrastructure is aging, and we have to invest in that infrastructure.

The second is technical guidance on how we can operate and maintain that infrastructure and what tools we can develop, such as flood forecasting models. National guidance on how we can manage areas that have been designated as flood plains is the most pressing issue.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Mr. Ali for four minutes.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Chair, I want to share my time with my colleague Mike Morrice. I think he might have some questions to ask.

To Sean Ledgerwood, the acting manager of water and air monitoring at the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, first of all, thank you so much for being here today and enlightening us with your knowledge.

In your view, what role can the Canada water agency have in Prince Edward Island's context?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: I'll go back to providing research, providing expertise and really giving us knowledge where we don't have the expertise, providing some of that and providing policies that would benefit and be useful for P.E.I. and that would be adaptable to P.E.I..

Those are the two main priorities for us.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: What role do you believe the Canada water agency can have in ensuring that we're prepared for the impacts that climate change is having on our freshwater resources?

Mr. Sean Ledgerwood: As I said, our climate change department is very aggressive with adaptation, and by having our department collaborate with experts in the field, the water agency may be able to provide and use that expertise to complement our program, complement our adaptation, going forward.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thanks.

Mr. Khan, thank you for being here. I'll ask you the same question.

What role do you believe the Canada water agency can have in Newfoundland and Labrador's context?

Mr. Haseen Khan: Thank you very much.

As I mentioned earlier, I think the best role that Canada water agency can play for Newfoundland and Labrador as well as for other jurisdictions is to act as a one-stop shop for all water-related issues and to provide national guidance to deal with emerging water issues in terms of best management practices and standard operating protocols that will apply to various regions of the country as well as to facilitate the management of various ongoing cost-share and work-share programs between federal government and jurisdictions, provincial and territorial governments.

The most important thing is to see additional innovation and research and development that will help jurisdictions to respond to climate change adaptation and climate change impacts.

• (1735)

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you so much.

Chair, I'd like to share my time with Mr. Longfield, please.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I managed a business that supplied water filters to paper mills. I was criticized, at some points of the year, because they had way too many filters, but when the floods hit in the spring they needed all the help they could get.

To Mr. Khan, can you comment on how important it is to maintain data so that we can adapt quickly when we need to?

Mr. Haseen Khan: Data plays a very important role in responding to these natural disasters or emergencies. We in Newfoundland and Labrador experienced a number of floods, which were not there historically, and we attribute those to climate change. Our real-time data monitoring network, both for water quantity and quality, is a blessing and a lifesaver because we can alert people in advance that “these are the areas that are potentially going to be flooded” and “these areas should be evacuated”.

We work with our fire and emergency services, so we work as a team in which our role is to analyze that technical data on a real-time basis and then share that information with municipalities and first responders.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Khan, I don't know if you've heard of Bill C-317. It dovetails with everything you're saying, and I hope it gets through the Senate.

That was a really interesting discussion from a different perspective—not from the perspective of provinces like Ontario, Quebec and B.C., but from the perspective of provinces in the Atlantic, which have different needs and a different perspective. Thank you. I think we benefited greatly from your testimony.

We're going to take a short break because we're going into a 106(4) meeting, colleagues.

Thank you again for making the trip to Ottawa for this meeting.

• (1735) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1745)

The Chair: We'll get back to it.

Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Can you confirm with the clerk that the funding agreements requested by this committee for the net-zero accelerator fund have not been received?

The Chair: Madam Clerk, have you received copies of the net-zero accelerator funding agreements?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Natalie Jeanneault): [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden, do you want to intervene on that?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Not before Mr. Mazier is finished...

The Chair: He's finished, I think. That was his question.

Mr. Dan Mazier: No, that's just the beginning. I just wanted to get that answer.

We have not received those documents. Is that correct?

The Chair: I haven't seen them.

Mr. Dan Mazier: No, we have not seen them.

The Chair: Okay, that was a rhetorical question.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: The records from Industry, Science and Economic Development with respect to the net-zero accelerator fund were received about two weeks ago. Is that not what we're talking about?

The Chair: There was a letter or some kind of—

Mr. Dan Mazier: There was a motion put forward.

The Chair: No, there was a—

Mr. Dan Mazier: You made it quite clear that we have not received the documents requested for the net-zero accelerator fund. We have not seen those agreements. That's it. You've answered the question and the clerk has confirmed.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Here we go. I'd like to move the following motion. I move:

Given that the government has failed to provide the committee with the following documents and information relating to their 8-billion-dollar Net Zero Accelerator fund:

all complete contributions agreements signed, to date, for the Net Zero Accelerator;

the government's complete tracker tool used to measure the Net Zero Accelerator's progress and results; and

all internal Net Zero Accelerator targets set by the government, including the government's Net Zero Accelerator emission reduction target—

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Pauzé.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I think Mr. Mazier is speaking too quickly for the interpreters, who don't have the text of the motion.

[English]

The Chair: You're going a bit fast for the interpreters.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I will give them a copy, too.

The Chair: We'll take a second here.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I'm sorry about that.

[Translation]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Mazier.

[English]

Mr. Dan Mazier: I'm sorry about that. It's \$8 billion. It's is pretty exciting.

I'll start from the top again:

Given that the government has failed to provide the committee with the following documents and information relating to their \$8-billion-dollar Net Zero Accelerator fund:

all complete contributions agreements signed, to date, for the Net Zero Accelerator;

the government's complete tracker tool used to measure the Net Zero Accelerator's progress and results; and

all internal Net Zero Accelerator targets set by the government, including the government's Net Zero Accelerator emissions reduction target.

The committee invite Simon Kennedy, Deputy Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Jean-Francois Tremblay, Deputy Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, and Jerry V. DeMarco, Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to appear before the committee on Tuesday, June 11, 2024 at 5:30 p.m. EST for no less than two hours; the committee invite the members of the Greenhouse Gas Interdepartmental Working Group and members of the Strategic Innovation Fund's Investment Review Committee to be present for technical questions as needed; the committee order the production of all (i) complete and unredacted signed contributions agreements and (ii) fully unredacted term sheets, to date, for Net Zero Accelerator; and the committee order the government's fully unredacted, unrestricted tracker tool used to measure the Net Zero Accelerator's progress and results.

Mr. Chair, this may be the first time in decades that the Standing Committee on Environment has been forced to call an emergency meeting, but it's for very good reasons. It's for \$8 billion. That's how much the Liberals charged taxpayers for the net-zero accelerator fund.

Four years ago, Justin Trudeau announced his net-zero accelerator fund. He promised Canadians that his \$8-billion program would reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, the environment commissioner revealed that the Liberals were giving away billions of dollars to Canada's largest emitters without any commitment to reduce emissions.

The environment commissioner stated, “the department did not always know to what extent [greenhouse gas] emissions had been reduced by those companies that took part in the [net-zero accelerator] initiative, or whether the funding provided would lead to reduced emissions.”

If members of the committee don't take this matter seriously, you're failing to do your job.

In fact, the commissioner also revealed the government wasn't even tracking the value for money of their \$8-billion net-zero accelerator fund. The commissioner stated, “we have seen no public reporting on the value for money”.

The Liberals think it's okay to give away billions of taxpayer dollars to multinational companies. Canadian taxpayers deserve to know what they're paying for. That's why the committee ordered the production of all the funding agreements and emissions reduction information on the government's net-zero accelerator fund.

However, the Liberal government completely defied our committee once again and refused to release the information. It was another slap in the face for this committee and to Canadians. In my opinion, it was a blatant breach of privilege.

Now we are dealing with an \$8-billion cover-up. In fact the Liberals claim that the emissions reduction target of the net-zero accelerator is protected under cabinet confidence. The government stated in its response to this committee, “ISED is not in a position to disclose the targets, as they are protected under Cabinet confidence.”

The government emissions reduction target for the net-zero accelerator fund is so secret that they're not even willing to share it with this committee. This is unheard of and it's absurd, but this isn't surprising, given that Canada's environment commissioner also reported that the Liberals are not on track to meet their own 2030 emissions reduction targets or given the fact that Canada dropped from 62nd to 67th on the climate change performance index. That's four rankings lower than the year before.

How can Liberals ask Canadians to pay for an \$8-billion program that was intended to reduce emissions, without showing anyone the results?

● (1750)

Now, suddenly, Minister Guilbeault is pretending this is a \$8-billion slush fund he isn't responsible for. He's pretending that the net-zero accelerator fund has nothing to do with him, despite the fact that it's supposed to reduce emissions.

However, that's not true. In Minister Guilbeault's mandate letter, the Prime Minister states:

To realize these objectives, I ask that you achieve results for Canadians by delivering the following commitments....

Support the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry in the implementation of the Net Zero Accelerator initiative, with an emphasis on ensuring that investments drive industrial transition and significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions on a scale consistent with achieving Canada's climate goals and meaningfully transform Canadian industry to lead and compete in a net-zero emissions future.

Even the advisory body that provides advice on the net-zero accelerator applications is co-chaired by Minister Guilbeault's own department. Minister Guilbeault must be held accountable for this \$8-billion cover-up.

I will also draw your attention to the response the Liberal government provided this committee. They stated that “[Greenhouse gas] reductions set to occur after 10 years' time cannot be reliably estimated.” The government also stated that “a precise estimate of reductions is not achievable for most pillar-2 and pillar-3 projects.”

It appears the \$8-billion net-zero accelerator is free cash for Canada's largest emitters. Meanwhile, the Liberals punish Canadians with a costly carbon tax. We must end this cover-up. We must release the contracts. We must release the emissions reduction targets. We must release the results and tell Canadians why they're paying for this Liberal government's \$8-billion net-zero accelerator slush fund. Anything less is a slap in the face to Canadians and this committee.

Thank you.

• (1755)

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden, please go ahead.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Before I start, I'd just like to state, on the record, that this is a blatant misuse of a 106(4), which are for emergency meetings. We meet twice a week in this committee, so this kind of alarmist, phony rhetoric from the Conservatives is not new, but misusing a 106(4) is silly and totally not necessary. We know that the Conservatives are doing it for clicks and likes on Facebook and not to actually achieve any progress in this committee.

Once again, I'll state that the net-zero accelerator fund does have emissions reduction targets attached to every contract. That's actually included in the press releases associated with the funding releases. For example, in Hamilton, we're investing with the steel industry to eliminate coal from the production of structural steel. It's fantastic. I went to McMaster University, and there used to be huge plumes of smoke. They continue to burn quite a lot of coal there, but using electric arc technology they will be able to eliminate the need for coal. That same practical application of electrical technology will be at Algoma Steel.

These are the types of things we're talking about. We're also investing in carbon capture and storage technology with some of Canada's largest emitters. In order to reduce emissions, we need to work with Canada's largest emitters. That's called low-hanging fruit. It's the opportunity to address the emissions where they are, and in a place like Hamilton with the steel sector, we can see them with our bare eyes. They're not something abstract. Those emissions are right in front of us. In the case of that investment, it was associated with a large number of emissions reductions that were clearly stated. I forget the exact number of megatonnes, but it was

in the order of 2,500 vehicles taken off the road in Hamilton, Ontario, which makes a big difference for air quality in Hamilton.

Mr. Chair, that's not the point. We can talk about that program or literally any other program in normal committee business at any time, but the Conservatives want to be alarmist and pretend there's some sort of a cover-up or a scandal going on, when we're just investing money in Canadian industries when they say they want technology. This is literally technology. We're investing in technology like electric arc for steel production and carbon capture and earth storage. They are always speaking out of both sides of their mouths.

Conservatives like to take to social media and suggest that the government is hiding contracts, but in many cases contracts need to be confidential because we're dealing with companies that want to maintain that confidentiality, so releasing confidential business information sets a really bad precedent for the government. Saying that the government is hiding something when it clearly isn't is just for clips, and it's absurd. All of the information they're suggesting would be in those contracts is literally in the press release.

The point is that our government is open by default, and I think it's fair to request that the department continue to work with companies in advance of the briefing to ensure that as much information as possible is available. Literally all of the demands of Mr. Mazier are addressed in the press release. I'll also state again that a 25-page document was delivered on the day it was requested. It indicates all of the information about the net-zero accelerator initiative from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada because, as I've also stated before, this is not an Environment and Climate Change program. It works with industry leaders, the steel industry and other sectors, ones that the Conservatives pretend they support, but when it comes to investing with them in collaboration to lower their emissions and get them off of dirty coal, the Conservatives seem to be against that too.

We know they don't believe in climate change. We know they don't care about reducing emissions, but we also now know that they don't care about the rigour of committee and using tools like a 106(4) effectively. We have no problem with any of these meetings. I think an in camera briefing from ISED officials would benefit us all. We could probably do that first and then decide afterwards if further meetings are warranted, Mr. Chair. This alarmist approach and lack of collaboration are really disappointing.

Thanks.

[Translation]

The Chair: The floor is yours, Ms. Pauzé.

• (1800)

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'd like to tell my colleague opposite that all the opposition parties signed the letter, in compliance with standing order 106(4). Could there be another way of getting there? I'm not really a procedural expert. Nevertheless, we all signed the letter. Basically, it's a matter of transparency because we would no doubt all agree that \$8 billion isn't peanuts.

As for confidentiality, as we are members of Parliament, people come to our offices and give us confidential information, which we don't disclose. It's a matter of trust in the work we do.

Who decides what's going to be considered confidential and what's not? That question needs asking too. I think we are right to demand more transparency, because the money was invested to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We want to know how the money invested will help reduce these emissions.

I'd like to return to the confidentiality issue, because I remember some interventions by the Prime Minister about foreign interference. He said it would be possible to invite opposition members to a secret meeting. If it's possible to hold secret meetings on security, then I can't see why we couldn't hold secret meetings here to discuss contracts. Our professionalism has to be trusted.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my colleague.

I know all parties signed the 106(4). Like I said, here we are, at the next meeting, talking about it. This is how it can work if we work together.

This is not an emergency meeting. An emergency meeting is not required for this. Like I said, it's a complete misuse of resources. I agree that we can absolutely have meetings about this. It would be great just to collaborate, rather than suggest there's some sort of urgency. We can have a meeting about this at any time.

Suggesting that the information wasn't delivered, as Mr. Mazier pointed out, is misleading. It was delivered. I went through the 25-page document with him at his desk in the House of Commons. I sat with him and asked, "Mr. Mazier, have you received the documents from ISED?" He said, "Yes, I have. I'm reading them right now." I said, "Good. I'm reading them, too."

Mr. Dan Mazier: You said you hadn't received them, actually.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: No, I had them in my inbox.

Mr. Dan Mazier: He hadn't had a chance to look at them. You hadn't received them. That's what you told me, but anyway, for the record—

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thanks. It's....

The Chair: Let's not have a discussion across the table. I'll let Mr. van Koeverden—

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: What I said was that I'd received—

Mr. Dan Mazier: [Inaudible—Editor] the last time you come and sit by my desk.

The Chair: I'll pause the meeting if I can't get co-operation.

We'll let Mr. van Koeverden finish, and then we'll go to Mr. Leslie and Ms. Ildout.

Mr. Mazier, did you want to get in on that? Is that what you're signalling? Yes.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Mr. Mazier makes a good point. Before I even opened the document, I sat with him at his desk to ensure that he had received the documents.

Mr. Dan Mazier: For correction and clarification, you stood—

The Chair: It's not a point of order, Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: You can "point of order" me if you want, but come on.

The Chair: It's not a point of order whether you're standing or sitting in the House.

Go ahead.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thanks.

I didn't need to visit Mr. Mazier at his desk. I didn't need to ask him if he had received the documents in question, but I did, because I wanted to make sure that he had. I did it because I collaborate on this committee and because I want to work with everybody. Indeed, he had received the documents in time. After that, I went and reviewed them myself.

There's a lot. There are four different documents between five and eight pages each. There's a lot of information in there, and I reviewed it as well. There's way more information in those documents than there was in the initial press releases.

Look, this government didn't invent cabinet confidence. Transparent by default doesn't mean we're going to divulge confidential information about how these programs and things are negotiated with big companies that want to remain competitive in a global economic environment.

You're right that, as MPs, we are entitled to more information than what should be or could be divulged to the general public. If we wanted a confidentially arranged meeting here with officials to discuss some of those numbers, we could do it in camera, but these meetings are broadcast to the public, as they should be.

Again, this isn't an emergency. It's something we could look into if we wanted to. I, personally, am very supportive of investing in technology and innovation with large businesses, particularly those which are large emitters. I don't see any point in sending \$400 million to an organization that doesn't do any emitting when we're looking to lower emissions—

Mr. Dan Mazier: You did that, though. You did that.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Mr. Mazier, it's my turn to speak. I'm here on your time because you would like to have an—

The Chair: Okay. Let's just—

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: —emergency meeting about this.

I'm going to finish my statement, which is that I'm happy to have another meeting. That's totally fine.

However, suggesting that this is an emergency or that we're withholding something is completely beyond the pale and a misuse of parliamentary resources.

The Chair: Mr. Leslie.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I'll happily let my NDP colleague go first, just because they haven't spoken yet.

• (1805)

The Chair: Ms. Idlout.

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik, Iksivautaq.* Thank you, Chair.

I have been given a very quick briefing from Laurel's staff, which I'm very thankful for. Having read Mr. Mazier's notice of motion, it is reasonable, given what was learned and not shared. I understand that there was a 106(4) letter written on May 31. To me, that is an acknowledgement of the failure of this government to make sure that information was shared that would help this committee make informed decisions about recommendations that need to be made in a report on this. That is important.

Given that, as I understand it, the response of the government is that there's sensitive business information, the NDP will support this motion if we can amend it so that there's one hour of a public session and one hour in camera. If there is information that needs to be considered that's more confidential, it can be discussed in camera.

The Chair: You're proposing an amendment, Ms. Idlout.

I have the motion here in front of me. Do you have the text of the amendment?

Ms. Lori Idlout: Yes, it's just a minor amendment.

The Chair: Where would you put it?

Ms. Lori Idlout: Right after “at 5:30” where it says, “no less than two hours”.

The Chair: Okay. It's “no less than two hours”. You're a lawyer—I know I'm not. Could we put a comma after “two hours” and say, “one of which would be in camera” and then we continue?

Ms. Lori Idlout: Yes...and one hour is in public.

The Chair: That's the amendment on the floor.

We'll have Madame Pauzé on the amendment.

We're going to have a brief recess first.

• (1805)

(Pause)

• (1835)

The Chair: Where were we? We had Madame Pauzé, who was going to speak on the amendment, and the amendment is to add a comma after “no less than two hours”, so it would be “no less than two hours, one of which would be in camera”. That's the amendment.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: No, I think rather that Ms. Idlout is going to propose something.

The Chair: Okay.

[*English*]

Are you withdrawing this amendment? Do you want to withdraw the amendment?

Do we have UC to withdraw the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We have another amendment. Mr. Leslie wants to propose another amendment. Is that right?

Mr. Branden Leslie: Yes, that is correct.

The Chair: Yes, you were on the list. Go ahead.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I don't know if it goes back to me—

The Chair: Yes, it goes back to you on the list, but you're going to use that time to propose an amendment.

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

I appreciate that we are running short on time. We had a lot of conversations between parties during the suspension there, and I think there are a number of reasonable questions we can ask officials that certainly should be in public. We understand that there are sensitive parts of the document, but I think we need to understand those sensitive parts, both of the contracts and of what cabinet confidences might possibly have to do with a target for this program in terms of reducing emissions as well as a number of other pieces out of what was a lengthy document. Ultimately, they did not respond to the three pieces of the initial request.

I would like to move the following amendment to change the motion put forward by Mr. Mazier. It will begin with a change in language on the fifth line following the bullet points, immediately following “for no less than two hours” and adding “with one hour in public followed by one hour in camera”. Further down in the same paragraph—

The Chair: Okay, it's “with one hour in public followed by one hour in camera”.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Further down within the same paragraph, on line 10, immediately following the words “for the Net Zero Accelerator”, amend it to add, “to be viewed by the committee and their staff, as long as required—”.

The Chair: You're going too fast for me. I'm sorry. Is this one amendment or two? Can we vote on both together?

Mr. Branden Leslie: It's all one amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It's all one amendment. Okay.

After “for the Net Zero Accelerator”—this is great that it's in writing; I appreciate that—it's “to be viewed by the committee”....

Mr. Branden Leslie: Yes, it continues “and their staff, as long as required by members of the committee, at least three days in advance of the meeting on June 11”. Continuing the amendment two lines further down, immediately following the words “Net Zero Accelerator's progress and results”, amend it by adding “to be viewed by the committee and their staff, as long as required by members of the committee, at least”—

The Chair: You don't say “by members of the committee”. You say, “the committee and their staff, as long as required, at least three days”. Is that what you're saying?

• (1840)

Mr. Branden Leslie: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. You didn't say “as required by members of the committee”. It's “as required...at least three days in advance of the meeting”.

Mr. Branden Leslie: It continues, “at least three days in advance of the meeting on [June 11th], and government provide public versions, (i.e. redacted) of all documents ordered by the committee in advance in order to understand what the government is deeming commercially sensitive and protected.”

The Chair: Let me pause for a second here. That's the amendment on the table.

I had Mr. Mazier next.... No, now we're debating the amendment. Who wants to speak to that?

Mr. Branden Leslie: Maybe I could just make a couple of comments as to why I think this amendment is necessary.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Obviously, there are a lot of questions that emerge. The reason we are having this 106(4) meeting is the lack of a clear response as requested by this committee from ISED. I know that there is some confusion regarding which department is the lead on this; however, this particular \$8-billion program certainly falls under the mandate of the environment minister.

The Chair: Do you want to speak to—

Mr. Branden Leslie: We have been left with many unanswered questions. Obviously, as I mentioned, I understand the commercial sensitivities of the contracts, but in looking through that response, it fails entirely, other than providing many words. The entire thrust of what this committee was looking for—the tracker tool and the targets—is for some reason behind cabinet confidence.

I know that this government has said that it has regularly allowed cabinet confidences to be released. That's largely only because it has come under investigation so many times as to why it was using it originally.

We see, as it relates to the Auditor General's report that came out today, similar double counting. I think that, at the end of the day,

this is about \$8 billion. Canadians were rightfully appalled when the environment commissioner highlighted that we don't know if there's value for money out of this program.

This whole thing started because the environment commissioner brought forward very legitimate questions, so I think it's entirely within the opposition's mandate and, in fact, it is our primary function in government to raise this as an important issue and to provide transparency to Canadians as to whether or not there's value for money in this \$8-billion fund that's ultimately supposed to be reducing emissions. We have no evidence that it's actually doing that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I have nothing to add.

The Chair: Okay. Nobody has anything to add...?

Do you have something to add, Mr. van Koeverden?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Yes. I'm just concerned that the—

Mr. Dan Mazier: Chair, I have a point of order. Do we have the resources? Have we checked into it?

The Chair: We're trying to get the resources. I would advise members to be taciturn if you want to get this through, one way or the other, or we may end up—

Mr. Dan Mazier: That's why I said I had nothing to add.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. van Koeverden, you're next.

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

As was discussed in our commercial break, we agreed collectively there should be an in camera session as the second hour of this meeting, where fully unredacted sheets and everything that was requested be viewed collectively. That was agreed upon, but it's not reflected in the amendment as I'm viewing it, so I would propose a subamendment here.

I'm also concerned that we agreed the unredacted documents should be viewed in camera so that we can discuss them and analyze them, but then this amendment as proposed suggests that they should be sent out three days in advance and viewed by all parties. I personally don't want confidential documents to arrive in my inbox to be viewed by my staff. I prefer, frankly, to have confidential documents viewed in camera. That's what the point of an in camera meeting is. I think the very premise that we have an in camera session is that we can—together—review these unredacted documents.

I would like to propose a subamendment to ensure the unredacted documents are viewed only in the second hour of this meeting and that redacted documents go out three days prior, and that there just be some indication that the second hour of the meeting will be the section that's in camera.

The Chair: Mr. Leslie.

I'm sorry. Just before we go to Mr. Leslie, do you have specific wording?

• (1845)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I asked for this amendment during the commercial break. I didn't receive it until afterwards, so here we are, on the fly, with one minute left in the meeting, trying to subamend. What I'm asking for is that redacted documents be sent out in advance—

The Chair: I understand.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: —and unredacted documents be viewed in the second half of the meeting, which will be in camera.

The Chair: I'm sorry. It's that redacted documents be sent out in advance—

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Yes.

The Chair: —and that unredacted documents be looked at in camera, in the meeting.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Yes.

The Chair: I need wording. I need....

An hon. member: It's not the proper format, so we can't accept it.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: It's 6:45, so....

The Chair: Mr. Leslie.

We're talking about your amendment. We're back to your amendment.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Sure. I wish I had the references in front of me. The Speaker has been extremely clear in previous rulings that this committee can ask for the production of any documents and, with that, I would like to call for a vote on the amendment.

An hon. member: On the subamendment...?

Mr. Branden Leslie: I didn't think you actually had one.

The Chair: No, you don't have it. It wasn't in good order.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: It would be in good order if everybody was working together on this committee. However, that's not where we're at.

The Chair: Madame Pauzé, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I have a translation, but it's not the official one.

I believe the wording of the motion means that the committee and its staff could consult the documents. However, nothing is said about receiving the documents. I would imagine that there would be a link available to consult them. We would thus be able to con-

sult them. That's what I understand of the motion. It's not exactly what Mr. van Koeverden is worried about, I don't think.

The Chair: You've raised a very interesting point, because it could mean that the documents would be in a particular location and that people would have to go there to consult them.

Is that what you wanted to say Ms. Pauzé?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: The motion doesn't say that we have to receive the documents, but rather that we have to have access to them.

The Chair: That's very interesting.

It's not an amendment. It doesn't specifically say that—

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: That wasn't even accepted. Is that right?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I understand what you're saying, Mr. Mazier. But Ms. Pauzé is telling us that we have nothing to worry about, because the proposed amendment to the motion does not say that the documents will be sent out by email. The amendment merely says that we will have the right to consult the documents. The documents could be at Environment Canada. Committee members who wanted to consult them would have to cross the river to do so.

Mr. van Koeverden, do you have anything to add?

[*English*]

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

What we discussed is that, collectively, we all agreed in the commercial break that none of us really wanted to be in the position to have viewed confidential documents going into a question and answer period with officials. I take the observations that you made with Ms. Pauzé. All I would ask—this is my subamendment—is that we add the words “in camera”. It would be “Net-Zero Accelerator to be viewed by the committee and their staff in camera, as long as required by members of the committee”.

The Chair: Where would you do this?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Where it says “the Net-Zero Accelerator be viewed by the committee and their staff”, we add “in camera, as long as required by members of the committee” because as you and Ms. Pauzé very rightly pointed out, it doesn't say anything about emails. That was my concern, that we're going to start sending confidential documents around over emails to staff and everybody—

The Chair: You're adding “in camera”. That's the subamendment.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: We're just going to view them in camera.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I want to observe that we agreed that viewing these documents prior to the question and answer period with officials would require us to be very judicious in the questions that we ask, because nobody here wants to compromise—

The Chair: We don't want anybody to be called on a point of privilege, so we have to be careful.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: That was the reason we might do the viewing of the confidential unredacted documents in camera afterwards.

The Chair: No, we don't seem to have that anymore.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: We're not doing that anymore. We agreed that we're abandoning that section of this, so we're going to have to be very judicious.

The Chair: Okay, so this is what we have to do.

• (1850)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Now we're going to have two in camera sessions. I would also—

The Chair: No, the documents will be somewhere, in a room, in camera, and people can consult them. They're not going to be distributed by email. People are going to go to a room if they want to consult the documents, and we don't know where that room will be. I think we've got it here, if you give me a second.

Mr. van Koeverden's subamendment is to simply add after “to be viewed by the committee and their staff”, the words “in camera”.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Yes, the words should be added in two places, following the same sentence about the net-zero accelerator fund.

[*English*]

It happens twice.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: All right.

The words “in camera” need to be added in two places.

If we adopt Mr. van Koeverden's subamendment, we'll be able to vote on Mr. Leslie's amendment as subamended.

[*English*]

Mr. Branden Leslie: I have a request, given that we are in public and I hope that....

The Chair: I think we've got this.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I'm not messing with the.... That's fine. We are in a committee of the House of Commons. I don't really want to

go to the department across the river. I believe that they should have the documents available through our committee here within the House of Commons precinct.

The Chair: We could have them wherever the committee secretariat is. I'm sure there's a little room where we can have the documents.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Your office...?

The Chair: Listen. It will be my office if it has to be. That's incidental, but I take your point. We shouldn't have to go across the river.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I will just say I'm not a lawyer. I'm a politician, and—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but Mr. van Koeverden has the floor.

Mr. Branden Leslie: —I would just like for somebody who knows how to do this stuff to maybe give us a bit of training on what's allowed and what's not so that we don't screw up.

The Chair: What do you mean by “what's allowed and what's not”?

Mr. Branden Leslie: What's cabinet confidence? What types of questions should we and shouldn't we ask? Just have a little briefing, perhaps.... I'll do this on my own if nobody else wants to do it—it's fine—I just think we want to make sure nobody—

The Chair: I think what's clear is that any question that reveals something that is.... Quite frankly, anything that reveals anything in the documents, in a way, cannot be the premise of a question.

I think we have agreement, so we can vote on Mr. van Koeverden's subamendment to Mr. Leslie's amendment. We're adding “in camera” twice.

(Subamendment agreed to)

(Amendment as amended agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Can we adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We are adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>