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• (1605)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): I'd like to welcome Mr. Wolfish and those who are accompanying him today. They are Caroline Blais, director, forest products and Fisheries Act, ECCC; Laura Cervoni, acting director, freshwater policy, Canada water agency; Wayne Jenkinson, executive director, national hydrological services; and Arash Shahsavarani, director, water quality monitoring and surveillance division.

We're going to break as we get closer to the votes, and then we'll resume after each vote. I believe we have unanimous consent for this. That way, we'll finish on time or just a bit late, but not too late.

Witnesses, make sure your mic and your earpiece are at a reasonable distance in order to prevent feedback, which harms the interpreters. When you're not using your earpiece, put it face down on this little coaster-like sticker on the desk, again to avoid feedback.

Mr. Wolfish, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Daniel Wolfish (Assistant Deputy Minister, Canada Water Agency, Department of the Environment): Chair and members of the committee, thank you for having me here today.

I'm Daniel Wolfish. I'm the acting assistant deputy minister for the Canada water agency.

It's a delight for me to return to your committee and to participate in your study. As the chair noted, I am joined by several colleagues.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we're located on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people, who have been stewards of these lands and waters for millennia.

I am very encouraged by your exploration of the provincial and territorial needs and perspectives.

[Translation]

Freshwater is an area of shared jurisdiction in Canada, and the federal government works very closely with the provinces, territories and indigenous rights holders. Canada is committed to upholding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

[English]

Budget 2023 announced a major investment to support and protect fresh water in Canada, including implementing a strengthened

freshwater action plan, creating the Canada water agency and advancing the review of the Canada Water Act.

We engaged provinces and territories on the creation of the Canada water agency. Many provinces and territories support the creation of the agency to strengthen the whole-of-government coordination and to support science, data and funding initiatives. The federal government has been clear that the agency's work will remain within federal authority, will respect provincial and territorial jurisdiction and will be highly collaborative.

[Translation]

In June 2023, the Canada Water Agency was created as a branch reporting to the Department of Environment and Climate Change.

Last November, as part of legislation included in Bill C-59, An Act to implement certain provisions of the fall economic statement tabled in Parliament on November 21, 2023, and certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 28, 2023, the agency was fully established as a stand-alone entity outside the department.

The agency's mandate is to improve freshwater management in Canada by providing leadership, effective collaboration at the federal level, and improved collaboration with the provinces, territories and indigenous peoples to proactively address national and regional transboundary freshwater challenges.

• (1610)

[English]

Our work will not duplicate or compete with existing legislative or regulatory frameworks for fresh water. The agency will focus on intergovernmental collaboration by leveraging existing FPT mechanisms, such as the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment.

There are other excellent examples of effective FPT co-operation, including the national hydrometric program, which is led by the national administrators table with representatives from each of the provinces and territories, and with the national hydrological services providing federal leadership.

The Canada water agency is delivering key elements of the strengthened freshwater action plan. These include work in eight federal water bodies of national significance. Many of these initiatives are already occurring in collaboration with provinces and territories, and there are long-standing agreements in place with Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba. Furthermore, ongoing work in inter-jurisdictional domestic water bodies has facilitated collaboration on transboundary freshwater management, such as the work of the Prairie Provinces Water Board and the Mackenzie River Basin Board.

[*Translation*]

The Canada Water Agency is also helping advance review of the Canada Water Act.

The pre-engagement phase has been launched. We are currently meeting with representatives from all interested provinces and territories. Furthermore, the agency provides support for the development of the National Freshwater Data Strategy. In September, we will be holding a workshop to collaboratively develop approaches to freshwater data.

Environment and Climate Change Canada leads the development of the National Freshwater Scientific Program and relevant engagement. This program will take the form of a road map, developed inclusively and collaboratively, to identify the most urgent freshwater challenges in Canada.

[*English*]

We recognize the committee's work on fresh water. We welcome your findings, and we're excited to see the conclusions of your freshwater study. This will certainly inform our work, going forward.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wolfish.

We are now moving on to questions.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. Before we start the clock, can I ask a question of clarification?

I'm still relatively new, but in my experience and previous understanding, when the bells are ringing, you can't drop the gavel because you can't get unanimous consent to start the meeting. I understand that we have witnesses here, and I don't want to prevent any of that from happening. My concern is about the precedent of the chair deciding to start a meeting while the bells are ringing.

Through you, Mr. Chair, to the clerk, is that an abnormality? Could we get some clarification on previous practice?

The Chair: Is Mr. Leslie correct?

However, I asked for UC to carry on the meeting and to stop and vote five minutes before the vote starts.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Was it in this meeting? How did it even start?

The Chair: Well, I asked for UC to proceed in the following way: We would start the meeting—I don't have what I said verbatim—then, when we're five minutes from the vote, stop and vote, then resume. In other words, we all stay here in the room and vote, so we don't waste time.

There was no objection.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I'm entirely in agreement. I'm happy and willing to do that. I was not here. I was voting in the chamber, so I did not hear that. My understanding is that, given the 15-minute bells following question period, the meeting could not commence. It's the same situation then as it was right after question period.

My concern is, broadly speaking, about the chair having the ability to drop the gavel without full attendance. A couple of my colleagues across the way came in late because they were in the exact same position. I worry about where this may lead within this committee or other committees.

• (1615)

The Chair: I know we always give 10 minutes after a vote. I thought I'd given 10 minutes, but maybe I stand corrected.

I apologize profusely to the committee, then. I asked for unanimous consent to carry on. Again, we had agreement that we'll stay in the room when the vote happens and break five minutes before the vote. In about 11 minutes and 11 seconds, we'll proceed that way.

Is everyone good with that?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Yes, I'm fine with that. I don't need to offer any reflections.

The Chair: I apologize if that's what I did in error.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Consent from all parties was given and that's, generally, the consensus rule—as long as we all agree, we're going to start. There are only five minutes between the last vote and these current bells—14 or 16 minutes ago.

The Chair: I probably should have allowed a bit more time for you, Madame Chatel and Madam Taylor Roy to get here. For that, I apologize.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I'm not trying to say anything negative towards the way you've done this.

The Chair: You just don't want to set a precedent.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Exactly.

The Chair: I agree.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Could I offer my concern that this not be undertaken again at this committee or anywhere else?

The Chair: It will not happen again, Mr. Leslie. I promise.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you.

I'll look to my colleagues to see whether we're all happy to continue on.

Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Well, go ahead. You have six minutes.

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

Mr. Wolfish, throughout the course of our study, multiple witnesses have appeared before the committee. They've told us they really don't understand, based on limited or, at best, a handful of engagements with the Canada water agency, what the agency is actually going to do. They don't understand what its purpose is, or what specifically will be undertaken out of your office, which is deeply concerning. I know the government has tried to identify, over the course of numerous years, what the agency will do.

I'm sure you've seen the movie *Office Space*, so I'll put it in a very simplistic yet comedic manner: What would you say you do here?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: There are two key elements of our mandate that I would like to put forward.

The first part is that we are to be implementing the freshwater action plan. That consists of eight freshwater ecosystem initiatives across the country, and we will be continuing to work with provinces and territories and other partners for their implementation.

The second element is the policy work that we do to coordinate the federal government, coordinate with provinces and territories and coordinate with Métis, first nations and Inuit on issues around freshwater policy for the Government of Canada.

Mr. Branden Leslie: To me, there hasn't been a convincing argument that there is.... Beyond anecdotes of standardization of data, there have been some pieces that seem necessary. That said, it hasn't been convincing that there needs to be an entirely new agency. Did anyone within ECCC, as far as you know, investigate whether or not the department could have done a similar task with existing resources?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: The department undertook consultations from 2020 to 2022. They spoke with thousands of Canadians. They had a number of bilateral and multilateral conversations with provinces and territories and held a separate consultation with first nations, Métis and Inuit.

In much of those interactions, it was recommended that an agency be created to be a focal point for coordination, for addressing issues around data and data accessibility and availability in Canada and to continue the work to implement the freshwater action plan, including being a place for the implementation of the agreements with Ontario, Manitoba and Quebec on the freshwater ecosystem.

Mr. Branden Leslie: We've had a number of provinces testify that the range has been anywhere from zero to maybe three meetings, if I could summarize them collectively, so the engagement, in my view, has not exactly been robust.

Would you be willing to table a summary of all those engagements? I assume you've done a "what we heard" report in the development of this, and I'm less concerned about online forms, particularly for the provinces that have the regulatory jurisdiction over water. Could you table that with this committee?

• (1620)

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We'd be able to provide you documentation on what we heard in our consultations with Canadians, with indigenous representatives and with the provinces and territories.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you.

How much money has been spent thus far in standing up the Canada water agency?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: I would have to get back to you on the numbers that we've spent in this past fiscal year, but it would be the equivalent of the salaries for the people who work in the program and the implementation of our freshwater programs. We can get back to you on how much was spent or is being spent in 2024-25.

Mr. Branden Leslie: How many employees are there?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: The agency is composed of the employees who were working on water previously in the various disparate units across the department. That's in the range of around 120 employees, who were working on various water programs and who have now come into the agency. Also, we've hired a few more to work on the policy and the coordination issues in the past year, and we're starting to build our corporate services.

Mr. Branden Leslie: How many of them are EX employees?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: In our executive cadre, we have nine, including me.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Have you allocated any dollars for any actual specific projects?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Indeed, we have a call out for programming for the Great Lakes. We have a call out for Lake of the Woods and for Lake Simcoe. We have a call out for Plan Saint-Laurent, and we are preparing calls for the other remaining freshwater ecosystem issues.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Could you table a summary of the entirety of those projects with this committee?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We could table for you those for which we have decisions. For those that we have a call out on, we don't have the decisions yet on what those projects will be, but we can certainly table with you what the call has been—the purpose of the call.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Will the agency have any regulatory powers?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: The agency will not have regulatory powers, no. The regulatory authorities for the minister that come from the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, the Fisheries Act or the Migratory Birds Convention Act that deal with water will remain with the department.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Will you monitor water flows and/or quantity or just water quality?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Water flow will continue to be done by the Meteorological Service of Canada. Water quantity, the science work, will continue to be done by Environment and Climate Change Canada's science and technology branch.

The Chair: Time's up.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Ali, who is participating in the meeting by video conference.

[*English*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is about the Canada water agency's relationship with the provinces.

The Chair: Mr. Ali, could you—

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Mr. Chair, I'm getting a call from the House for Commons, maybe the technical side.

The Chair: Yes. You need to have your screen on in order to participate.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: I have my screen on.

The Chair: Okay, there's a problem then.

We'll go to Mr. van Koeverden and then come back to you in the second round.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Yes, please.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. van Koeverden, go ahead, please.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thanks very much.

Thank you, again, for attending this meeting. I think it's our last meeting.

Is this our penultimate or last meeting of this very important study?

The Chair: Yes, it is.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: As somebody who's loved Canadian waterways for most of my life, I'm very grateful for all of your work. This work is essential. We—when I say “we”, I mean people who use Canadian waterways for recreation, fishing and otherwise—are grateful for your work.

Previously, I've spoken about the importance of conservation authorities and their water management programs. I've kind of seen this a little bit as an extension of that work that we're able to do in Ontario because of the gift of forethought many, many years ago. Establishing the conservation authorities provided Ontario and Ontarians with a lot of reassurance, provided insurance companies with a lot of data, and provided developers with dos and don'ts.

Sections of my riding of Milton, for example, are a flood plain. It doesn't look like a flood plain, but when a 50-year or 100-year

storm comes through, there would be damage. We're really grateful for that work. There's that old adage that the best time to plant a tree was 50 years ago, so why not do it today? I'm glad to see that, from the perspective of a water agency, we're doing that today, because it's very, very important work.

Congratulations on the progress. I didn't know that there already were calls out for many water bodies that are close to our regions. Just among the four of us here, I think you named parts of our watersheds. Are you able to shed any water or light on those projects, or are they still embargoed due to the fact that they're under consideration?

• (1625)

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We've done a call. I should add that Lake Winnipeg has also been part of our recent calls. We've done a call. Right now, we're working through the ones that came from the Great Lakes in particular. That's our largest program and the one with the most significant interest. In fact, the conservation authorities formed a large number of those who made applications for funding. We're certainly going through them now.

What I can say is that we received more applications than we have budget for. This is, then, showing a sign of significant interest in the work that we have to do. We have a number of pillars of work for which we've asked for proposals. One deals with the basin in and around Lake Erie to manage nutrient and phosphate flows going into Lake Erie. We have others around the areas of concern and trying to deal with contaminants in and around the Great Lakes. We continue to move the areas of concern off the shared list that we have with the United States. Many of these programs are dealt with and are priorities through the Canada-U.S. Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

Similarly, we have priorities for Lake Winnipeg around nutrient loading, governance and partnerships.

We continue to work with Quebec in identifying the priorities that we need to do around the St. Lawrence action plan. In fact, we've initiated conversations with Quebec around renewing the agreement with Quebec on the St. Lawrence action plan, given that the agreement will come due in 2026. Early conversations are under way.

There is a lot of programmatic work that we're starting to undertake.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: That's fantastic. Congrats on all the progress. It's wonderful to see.

Mr. Wolfish, in 2023, our budget provided “\$650 million over ten years, starting [this year], to support monitoring, assessment, and restoration work in the Great Lakes”—all the ones you mentioned, I believe.

It's been a long time, in my view, since any government in Canada has expressed such sincere interest in supporting the Great Lakes and the Great Lakes watershed. Frankly, it's overdue. It's a huge step forward for our region in water protections and stewardship. Thank you for undertaking that work.

I was hoping to connect it a bit to some of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission's work on preventing lamprey infestations.

Could you elaborate on any of those potential areas where the Canada water agency will be able to support and—I'll stop using water analogies as soon as I'm done—buoy that work?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We are navigating those waters. We're in our canoe. We have our paddle.

I've had the opportunity to meet on several occasions with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. There was a Great Lakes Day in Washington that we participated in. There was also a Great Lakes Day here on the Hill. I met with them individually. I also meet with the International Joint Commission and others who are involved in Great Lakes work.

There was recently an initiative in Montreal, where the Great Lakes mayors were meeting to talk about the Great Lakes and development of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence. We continue to engage with many of those partners to learn about opportunities to collaborate on data, on science and on opportunities for collaboration within the freshwater ecosystems initiatives, and to continue talking about the policy agenda that we need to develop.

One of the key pieces that we're looking at doing is recognizing that we should always keep an eye two, three or four years out into the future on the kinds of issues that we want to be ready to provide advice on, given the water challenges we have in Canada, to continue to work with them to be able to collect their policy work and their data and to ready ourselves to be strong advisers to the government on freshwater management.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thanks.

Is the Great Lakes initiative that you mentioned the Great Lakes freshwater ecosystem initiative?

• (1630)

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We have eight freshwater ecosystem initiatives across the country. They include the Great Lakes, Simcoe and Lake of the Woods, and similar action plans were listed in New Brunswick, Lake Winnipeg, Fraser and—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Dear colleagues, we will take a break to go vote and then resume the sitting.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: Now that our duty is done, we are resuming the sitting.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Technical difficulties*] we held several meetings, and met with a lot of people. I think everyone who testified before the committee talked to us about the Canada Water Agency and gave it a mandate.

I entertained myself by noting some of what was said. Representatives from a leaders' coalition of the water surveillance community, the Living Lakes Network, the AquaAction organization, the Gaspé Beaubien foundation, the city of Montreal, the Canadian Association on Water Monitoring, the Eau secours organization and several others all made recommendations to the agency. Among those recommendations, we specifically heard that eliminating ministerial silos is essential; taking an integrated approach is necessary; the barrier between Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada and the Minister of the Environment must come down; co-operation between federal departments needs improvement; and a collaborative and intergovernmental approach is needed, from ideas to implementation.

Your shoulders may feel heavier just listening to it.

If I understand correctly, the Canadian Council of Ministers for the Environment will have the authority to coordinate effectively—we hope—meetings and collaborations between different levels, such as between the federal government and provincial and territorial governments, as well as indigenous communities.

What will we put in place to ensure real, productive and definitive conversations not only between levels of government, but also between federal departments?

What we are hearing is that departments work in isolation. Do you think that there will be more collaboration, or is this just one more structure that will have to be taken into account?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Thank you for the question.

I had the opportunity to meet with many stakeholders, including representatives from the Gaspé Beaubien foundation, which launched AquaAction, and is part of the Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters. It is true that many federal departments work in silos. That's why the government decided to create the Canada Water Agency. Breaking down silos is an essential part of our mandate.

To fulfill this mandate, we created a coordinating committee representing all assistant deputy ministers with responsibilities relating to freshwater management. It includes, for example, people from Natural Resources Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Indigenous Services Canada. Each person is focused on the issues for which they are responsible. The committee's objective is to coordinate activities and provide advice to cabinet members.

Furthermore, my colleague Ms. Cervoni created what we call a policy centre. This centre has members from six departments, including Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and its mandate is to create new policies that take each department's mandate into account. This group is responsible for coordination and integrated policies at the Canada Water Agency.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: That means you're sure you won't just be one more structure, and can ensure better coordination between all the stakeholders, which was the ask put forward by just about everyone.

On your website, it says that the "Canada Water Agency delivers on key elements of the strengthened Freshwater Action Plan," that it "is leading the modernization of the Canada Water Act," that it "provides policy leadership and develops whole-of-government approaches to freshwater challenges and opportunities" and "makes it easier for Canadians and decision makers to find federal freshwater resources."

I'm sure you understand that our concern at the Bloc Québécois is always to avoid interference in areas of jurisdiction that fall under Quebec and the provinces.

Is it possible to review the structure of Environment and Climate Change Canada, so as to ensure optimal use of the expertise already available within the department?

• (1640)

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We took a few steps to optimize resources and expertise. First, I'm developing a memorandum of understanding with the department to determine how we can work closely with organizations such as the Meteorological Service of Canada, the Science and Technology Branch and the people mandated with implementing the Fisheries Act.

Implementing this structure and a coordinating committee will lead to sharing information, discussing challenges, coordinating required responses and providing advice to ministers. The objective is to create a single, integrated channel for providing advice to our minister.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you.

I want to come back to what people frequently told us about sharing information. I would imagine you're also concerned about this, on your side. I'm sure they talked to you about it.

What, exactly, will be implemented to promote information sharing between all these people?

The Chair: That is an excellent question, but your time is up, Ms. Pauzé.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'll be able to come back to it during my next turn for two and a half minutes.

The Chair: Yes, you may. In any case, I would very much like to hear the answer as well, but unfortunately, my hands are tied.

Ms. Collins, you have the floor.

[English]

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

First, I want to thank all of the witnesses for coming today, sharing your expertise and answering our questions.

We have heard from a number of the witnesses who joined us for this study that there is a funding disparity between the central regions of Canada and British Columbia. The Fraser River is the only watershed in B.C. that was included on the priority list for the Canada water agency. In my home province of British Columbia, our watersheds are under threat from multi-year droughts, extreme flooding and other climate impacts, but also from industry.

How are you addressing that concern about the disparity between different regions?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Thank you for that question.

It is true that there is a disparity, at the moment. The Great Lakes program has been around for almost 50 years, so it's well developed. We have targets and results that we can measure. That's helped build momentum and continuing results. Similarly, we've had a good history of almost 30 years now of working with Quebec on the St. Lawrence action plan. We're getting there on Lake Winnipeg. We've had some very good progress. We have an MOU with Manitoba. We're starting to develop some very good targets and approaches, again, so that's gathering momentum.

We're at the stage where we need to do that now in a few other places—the Fraser, the Mackenzie and the Wolastoq being key places where we need to start to move forward. Our goal is to continue to work with people in the Fraser and the Government of British Columbia to identify the kind of science we need to do. Using that science, how can we start to develop the appropriate types of targets? What are the gaps in information that we have? From there, we can start working on an action plan. I think those will take some time for us to do, but the goal would be to go, through that collaboration, from early conversations to ones where we can make a solid case for investment.

Ms. Laurel Collins: One of the other issues that were raised as threats to B.C. waters was invasive zebra mussels. That's a big concern.

What are we doing to prevent the spread of zebra mussels and to be proactive about this threat?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: That's a great question.

Zebra mussels and invasive aquatic species tend to be the responsibility of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Our goal would be to continue to work with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and look for opportunities with them.

We would do this across any of our freshwater ecosystems, whether it's for zebra mussels, sea lamprey or Asian carp. We look to see what tools are available and in place given their mandates, what our partners are doing and what actions we can put on the ground as part of our freshwater ecosystem initiatives to prevent the spread of invasive species.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Do you have a sense of whether that's a reactive approach or a proactive approach? What we've heard from witnesses is that, once zebra mussels are there, it feels like it's almost a lost cause.

• (1645)

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: I would need to defer to Fisheries and Oceans regarding how they've designed their approach and whether it's proactive or reactive.

Our goal would be to continue to work with our stakeholders and Fisheries and Oceans to survey what additional actions we can take through the Canada water agency to help support them.

Ms. Laurel Collins: One of the concerns I have is around the siloing of this kind of work. It seems important that the Canada water agency would work very closely with Fisheries and Oceans.

Is there any way you could follow up with some information about how you work with the Department of Fisheries on this issue?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Absolutely.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thanks.

Another question is around the nation-to-nation relationships that are so central to the work you're embarking on.

How are you working in collaboration with individual indigenous nations and engaging with the diversity of nations in addition to the national indigenous organizations?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Thank you. I'll answer that question in two ways.

I'll start with our programmatic work on the ground. In each of our freshwater ecosystem initiatives, we sought out partnerships with first nations and Métis, largely. We have not had the same outreach yet with Inuit, in large part because we don't have freshwater ecosystem initiatives in Inuit communities. For example, in Ontario, we have a relationship with the Chiefs of Ontario and the Métis Nation of Ontario. We're looking at a funding arrangement. We're co-developing that funding arrangement with them to help identify the priorities they would like to pursue in those ecosystems and then implement them.

We take a different approach in each ecosystem, depending on the relationship with the province and the priorities of the province. We're taking a similar approach in the Lake Winnipeg basin. We're working closely with Quebec on identifying ways to work with first nations, and that will be part of our ongoing conversations as we renew our Canada-Quebec agreement for the St. Lawrence action plan. That's on the programmatic level.

At the national level, we have started to engage with first nations, Métis and Inuit at the provincial and federal levels and through a variety of other mechanisms to talk about how we want

to work with them on the modernization of the Canada Water Act. The goal here is to develop, with them, mechanisms and ways to interact so that we're being respectful of traditional ways of information sharing and of the information they may hold. We want to make sure we're bringing the water carriers into the conversation.

We're planning to have a bit of a grassroots assembly of first peoples—Inuit, Métis and first nations—to have a conversation around water and share perspectives. We're looking to do so in a way that is sensitive to the needs, approaches and perspectives that first nations, Métis and Inuit have on water.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you. The six minutes are up.

We are moving on to the second round.

You have the floor, Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, dear colleagues.

Ladies, gentlemen, welcome to your Parliament.

We are gathered here to talk about the Canada Water Agency. We are all passionate about water; it goes without saying.

I'd like to give a little shout-out to a member of the committee, Mr. Adam van Koeverden, who spoke earlier about recreational aquatic activities. When one participates in the Olympic Games and wins four Olympic medals, one of them a gold, it's a bit more than "recreational," in my point of view. It's rather exceptional.

Sir, I wish you a happy 20th anniversary with your gold medal.

Mr. Wolfish, I want to acknowledge you and your bilingualism, which is very inspiring for us all. I greatly appreciate it.

Earlier, my colleague, the member for Terrebonne... Is it Terrebonne, Ms. Pauzé?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Come on, Mr. Deltell, I'm the member for Repentigny.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Pardon me.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Terrebonne is the neighbouring riding.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Yes, of course. I often go through there, in fact. That's where I stop to recharge my electric car.

Earlier, we were talking about the principle of jurisdictions. It is obvious, Mr. Chair, that water falls under the jurisdiction of every level of public administration. It involves federal, provincial and municipal governments. Canada covers over 5,000 km. There are 10 provinces, 3 territories and nearly 4,000 municipalities, if not more.

Mr. Wolfish, how do you manage everyone's jurisdictional issues within the scope of a water-related project, problem or issue?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Thank you for your question.

I would say it depends on the situation or the specific issue. A regulatory question or problem should fall under the responsibility of those mandated to implement the legislation or the team responsible for implementing a regulatory program. That's important, because for the federal government, some regulations should be put in place.

The Canada Water Agency's objective is to coordinate efforts in terms of regulation and freshwater management and protection programs, while taking into account shared responsibilities and jurisdictions. The agency will not have a regulatory role. It's clear that each province has its own regulatory framework and its own water management programs. Our objective is to respect that and coordinate our efforts to implement programs that protect or restore aquatic ecosystems.

• (1650)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I will ask you a somewhat sensitive question on the relationships we might have with first nations. Relationships between first nations sometimes lead to debates. That's normal.

Let's take an example that affects an area closer to my riding. I've had the great honour and privilege of representing the Wendake Wendats for nearly 16 years now, first at the Quebec legislative assembly, and now here. The Wendats are claiming Nion-wentsio, their ancestral land. It includes the Laurentides wildlife reserve north of Quebec and extends to Lac-Saint-Jean and the Saguenay region.

However, there is overlap with part of the territory claimed by the Innu nation, which is causing concerns.

In short, some First Nations claims overlap each other. First Nations don't necessarily speak with one voice. It's legitimate and it's normal, as it would be in any other situation.

What do you do in a case like that?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: To start, we would ask: Which jurisdictional pillar is involved?

We want to respect Quebec's leadership in terms of managing resources in Quebec. Recently, I had the opportunity to meet with an Abenaki community. We have a partnership with them to implement some programs included in the St. Lawrence Action Plan, 2011 to 2026.

Our goal is to coordinate our activities based on the priorities outlined by Quebec and its partners in the province regarding the action plan, in order to uphold the agreement between Quebec and Canada for those activities.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Ali, are you connected now? You were connected with the audio, but now we can see you.

You have five minutes for your questions.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Chair, are we in the first hour or are we in the second?

The Chair: We're in the first hour but the second round of questions. We're with the Canada water agency.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: My first question is about the Canada water agency's relationship with the provinces. At our meeting on June 4, we heard from provincial government witnesses about their concern that provincial jurisdiction is respected. They did not want that agency to be a regulator or duplicator of services that the provinces are already doing. They wanted the agency to be support-focused, with the ability to collaborate on major water projects, cost-sharing opportunities, building infrastructure and information and knowledge sharing.

How would you respond to those concerns? How will the Canada water agency ensure that it does not infringe on provincial jurisdiction? Will the Canada water agency expand federal responsibility for fresh water, and, if so, in what ways?

• (1655)

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: When we did our consultations with provinces and territories over the period of 2020 to 2023, we heard similar comments. If you look at the bill that is currently before the Senate now for the creation of the Canada water agency, you'll note that the agency does not have a regulatory mandate. That's important, because we recognize the regulatory role played by the provinces and territories or that already exists and is performed well by other federal departments. We have no intention at this time of moving into a regulatory role.

The provinces have noted that they want to have opportunities for identifying projects and priorities and to have joint funding programs, and that's, indeed, what our freshwater ecosystem initiatives are about. If you look at some of our partners in Ontario, the conservation authorities are, in fact, creatures of the province. Through the St. Lawrence action plan, we provide support to Quebec. With Lake Winnipeg, we have partners that we fund jointly. In many cases, our funding has matches from provinces and other sources, so we have an opportunity to be able to work together on joint funding for projects. Through the MOU with Manitoba, the Canada-Ontario agreement and our agreement with Quebec, we're able to identify joint priorities and allow for those priorities to pattern our work.

The Canada water agency does not have an intention at this time to expand federal areas of work but rather to break the silos to coordinate. Frankly, there's enough work on our plate just doing that, bringing together a coordinated function and bringing expertise together. An example of what we've recently done in this area is that we joined as a junior partner with ISC to help support them in the co-development with the AFN of Bill C-61, which is currently at second reading in the House of Commons. That was a very early accomplishment that I feel the agency was able to undertake that shows exactly how we can bring expertise together to break down silos but not get in the way of the role of provinces and territories.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

Canada is continuing to see the impacts of climate change, and this year's wildfire season is starting off very early. What role do you expect the Canada water agency to play in adapting to the impacts of climate change in the context of our water resources?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: I'll start with that answer, and then if my colleague from MSC wants to chime in, we'll certainly provide that opportunity.

We recognize that it's not just wildfires, drought, floods and variability. We want to work very closely with Environment and Climate Change Canada on the adaptation strategy, continue our work on policy research, coordinate across the federal government on these issues with our federal partners, and continue to gather information, intelligence and analysis from our academic partners, first nations, Métis, Inuit and the provinces and territories, so that we can continue to develop avenues of dialogue and conversation and then, where necessary, support federal departments or provinces in the actions they will take. This is a long-term project for us, recognizing that climate change impacts are part of the ongoing work we need to do.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Unfortunately, the five minutes are up.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you.

In large part, you answered the question on sharing information, which was an ask from everyone. However, you just said you will continue to collect information. I think people don't want you to collect it; they want you to communicate it.

So, is there something else planned in that respect?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Thank you for the question.

There are several ways to communicate information and data. First, we are organizing a workshop in Burlington in September. The goal is to create a framework for collecting and sharing data and to look into communications, accessibility and interoperability challenges. So, that's one approach.

Then, we are also working with our partners on a strategy or national framework for science and technology. My colleague from the science and technology branch could tell you more about it.

• (1700)

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Every departmental group and representative we've heard from told us that they don't have access to all the information. Of course, there is an astronomical amount of information, but it represents a very significant concern. I'd like to make a connection with global warming. We know that it causes flooding and drought. In some parts of the country, there are even water shortages.

Do you have a specific role to play in that respect?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Are you talking about climate change?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Have you considered all that, or measures you could recommend to the federal government to address these issues?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We have a role to play in terms of contributing to the dialogue on the consequences of climate change. The Department of Environment and Climate Change has a general section mandated to conduct research, coordinate activities and carry out the government's climate change process.

We want to be—

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Collins, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Laurel Collins: I met with members of the Mikisew Cree First Nation a couple of weeks ago, and they are deeply concerned about the quality of water in their communities and the effects of the tailing pond runoff. They've requested, for almost two decades now, a health study. They have abnormal rates of bile cancer—rare forms of cancer that shouldn't be occurring in these numbers. I'm curious about how your department is working to ensure that first nations and other indigenous communities have access to clean drinking water and whether there's an update on the funding for the health study they're asking for.

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: I don't have an update on the funding for their health study, in part because that's not an area where the Canada water agency will take leadership. What I can say is that we are working very closely with Indigenous Services Canada on the bill, which is currently before Parliament, for clean water for first nations. We were a junior partner with them, working with the AFN, in the co-development of that bill. We support them in the dialogues they have with Treaties 6, 7 and 8 in Alberta, where, I believe, the Mikisew Cree First Nation participates in those processes. We support Minister Hajdu in the work she's doing, recognizing the important leadership role that she plays. We continue to have a relationship and work with Health Canada in the work they do on water quality and health.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thanks.

What steps is your department taking to address the concerns we've heard at this committee around PFAS, especially on our drinking water, but also on contamination in lakes and rivers across Canada?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Caroline, do you want to take that one?

Ms. Caroline Blais (Director, Forest Products and Fisheries Act, Department of the Environment): Sure. Thank you for the question.

Environment Canada has various tools to control pollution, including regulatory controls. Right now, we continue to work with Health Canada to assess the chemicals. What I can say today is that there should be additional reports released in the coming months.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kram.

• (1705)

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for joining us today.

Last week, the committee heard from witnesses from the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency. They talked in considerable detail about a major irrigation project in Saskatchewan, with water coming from Lake Diefenbaker.

Mr. Wolfish, you've talked in this meeting about funding initiatives from the Canada water agency and joint funding for projects with the provinces. You said that a call for proposals went out for projects in the Great Lakes, the Lake of the Woods, Lake Simcoe and Lake Winnipeg.

Is the Lake Diefenbaker project also one of the projects that you're looking at?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Lake Diefenbaker is not part of these particular freshwater ecosystem initiatives, although we are concerned about the basin for Lake Winnipeg.

We recently had conversations with our Saskatchewan colleagues. They've raised some of these issues. I'm aware that they're also interested in investments in water management infrastructure for farmers and other agricultural needs.

Some of these questions are important for us to coordinate and learn more about, and then for us to be able to work with them in connecting with housing, infrastructure and communities on the roles they could be playing in supporting some of these initiatives, if possible.

Mr. Michael Kram: What are the criteria for some of the joint funding for projects?

The Lake Diefenbaker project was very clearly the number one ask from the Government of Saskatchewan. How can we work that ask into the criteria for these joint funds?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: I'm happy to share the criteria with this committee. We can come back and show you the criteria we are using in the various ecosystem initiatives.

Mr. Michael Kram: Can you share them with us now, or do you have to...?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: There are a few pieces. Some of them around eligibility are technical in nature. We have criteria around the priorities we set for each of the freshwater ecosystems in the Lake Winnipeg area. The concerns are often around nutrient loading, indigenous partnerships, value for money and these sorts of pieces.

Those types of criteria are used to evaluate project proposals that come in from our partners. Those that meet those criteria may or may not get funding.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay.

On the calls for proposals that have already gone out, have there been any calls to the Government of Saskatchewan or any other stakeholders in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: They tend to go out to our partners. We work in collaboration with the provinces. That's in the Lake Winnipeg area and, largely, with Manitoba. Our calls will go out with information to the provinces. We fund the partners directly, not the province, in most cases.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay.

When you say "our partners", to whom are you referring?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: They could be a variety of different organizations. They could be not-for-profit organizations working the landscape. They could be organizations like ALUS, which does work with farmers. They could be first nations or Métis communities. They could be municipalities. They could be conservation authorities.

A variety of partners may be working in those freshwater ecosystems.

Mr. Michael Kram: If somebody wanted to apply for one of these projects tomorrow, is there an application form on the website? How does one go about going through the application process?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: It depends on when we launch the call and when the closing dates are. We have information that goes on the website. We send our information to our network of partners through the FEIs. They often call with questions. We work through those questions with them.

There's an end date for proposals. We then go through a period of eligibility review, technical review and a challenge function, and then we make our recommendations.

Mr. Michael Kram: If I understood correctly, the applicants have to wait for the Canada water agency to contact them.

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: They are welcome to contact us for more information. We're happy to give people information on the opportunities that are available.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay.

Another concern the witnesses expressed was on the duplication of services that the provinces are already doing. How will the Canada water agency be conscientious in not overlapping or duplicating work that provinces are already doing?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: I guess it depends on the issue and the province.

Our goal is to work with the provinces in identifying the priorities that we should be having to work on. If it's a policy area or a coordination effort, there may be a variation across the country. We'll want to hear from the provinces around their issues and their priorities. We've had a number of bilateral conversations across the country to date. We're continuing to do so. We also leverage a multilateral forum to exchange information.

In the programming work we do, we use mechanisms under the Canada Water Act, such as the MOU with Manitoba, the agreement with Quebec and the Canada-Ontario agreement, to identify shared priorities and then divide up the work.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Taylor Roy.

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

As this is our last meeting on this important study, I'd like to make a comment and then ask a broader question about the Canada water agency.

First, I'd like to thank you for the call for proposals, in particular on the freshwater ecosystems. I represent Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, and it's very important for Lake Simcoe in particular.

Many of my constituents are concerned not only about Lake Simcoe but about fresh water across Canada and the challenges we're facing. In fact, in the public engagement process, as reported in the “what we heard” report, almost all the people who participated in that process supported the government's initiative to establish the Canada water agency. I think it spanned 75 days of engagement, over 2,700 Canadians, 900 national forums, six regional forums, tens of thousands of website visits, emails and much more, and it ensured regional engagement from coast to coast to coast.

Also, then, in this committee, we've heard from a great many witnesses over the course of this study, most of whom support and find a need for a Canada water agency, but there are some who question the need for it, including a member of our committee, who questioned it earlier in the meeting. Because of that, I want you to comment broadly on the need for the Canada water agency. Even though we've had provincial and territorial watershed authorities and many departments and agencies in the government addressing the serious issues facing us with fresh water, we still see that the challenges have been increasing over the past few decades.

As someone who is concerned about the future of our country—the future for the next seven generations, as indigenous people often say—I feel that if we don't have this coordinated, concerted effort made by the government to establish the Canada water agency, we're not going to be able to address a lot of these challenges.

I'm talking about things like droughts, obviously, and the tailings ponds, and the management of water and water quality—in fact, all the sorts of things that we've been talking about.

If you could, talk a bit about how the CWA is going to address those concerns more broadly, why you think this is necessary and what might happen if we didn't put this in place at this stage in terms of the progress of these challenges and the destruction of our fresh water.

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: I'd start off by saying that protecting our fresh water in Canada is a major effort, and it requires lots of different tools: regulatory, financial, information, science, modelling. It's a big effort.

Right now, we're all operating in our silos. There is not much of a mechanism to share that information across those silos, to develop coordinated advice to support ministers or cabinet; to engage with provinces and territories in a coherent, integrated fashion; and to provide an opportunity to hear and listen to Métis, first nation and Inuit perspectives and to do so in a way that's respectful of indigenous traditions and the need for removing colonial approaches to the way we engage with them—to do a distinctions-based approach.

What we're doing in the Canada water agency is creating that focus, that place to be able to do that, and to be able to do that provides a voice directly to the minister that's not mitigated by others who have to manage or mitigate that through other avenues or vehicles.

We provide an opportunity, a single window, for the provinces or territories to engage with us on questions so that we can then navigate the federal system with them. We won't have all the tools all the time. We won't have all the solutions, but our job is to help figure that out for Canadians, creating a portal site—what we would call a “one window on water” or WOW—to help Canadians navigate the system, to get information and to connect with where the appropriate information and responsibilities lie.

Water is going to be the issue of the 21st century. Water will have pressures from industrial growth, agricultural development and changes in climate change. Having a place that can be a focal point to bring the dialogue together, to provide that advice and to connect with provinces, with first nations, with Métis and with Inuit is something that is, from my perspective, a value added that we can bring to the team.

• (1715)

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you very much. That really wrapped it up nicely. I appreciate your comments on this.

As we heard from indigenous witnesses, water is life. It's not just a resource to be managed; it's something we need to respect. We really need to think about it in the way that you described.

Thank you for your work, and, to all the witnesses, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

That brings our first panel to a close.

I would also like to thank you, Mr. Wolfish, for the great work that you and others at this table are doing to advance Canada's water security at a time of water stress and climate stress. Thank you very much.

It's been wonderful having you before the committee at different times for this study. I hope you'll find our report, which should come out in the fall, interesting and useful for the work that you do.

Colleagues, we'll just break for a minute. We'll start up with our second panel very shortly.

Thank you.

• (1715) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We are ready to continue the meeting with the second panel of witnesses. All the participants are online. Sound tests were done. Everything is fine there.

We welcome four individuals from three different entities.

We have with us a representative from the Government of Alberta, Ms. Kate Rich, assistant deputy minister of policy, the environment and protected areas.

We also have a representative from the Government of the Northwest Territories, Mr. Julian Kanigan, assistant deputy minister of environmental management, monitoring and climate change at the Department of Environment and Climate Change.

Finally, we welcome two representatives from the government of Yukon, Ms. Heather Jirousek, director of water resources, and Mr. Brendan Mulligan, senior scientist for groundwater and water resources at the Department of Environment.

We will start with Ms. Rich.

Ms. Rich, you have five minutes to speak.

[*English*]

Ms. Kate Rich (Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy, Environment and Protected Areas, Government of Alberta): Thank you very much for this opportunity to appear before the committee. I am joining you from Edmonton, Alberta, on the traditional territory of the signatories to Treaty 6. I also acknowledge the Métis people of Alberta, who have a deep connection to this land.

Water management is a priority of the Government of Alberta, and I really appreciate the opportunity to briefly share some key elements to ensure the protection, conservation and fair allocation of water for Albertans now as well as in years to come.

Alberta's water for life strategy outlines our commitments to managing and safeguarding water. The strategy was established in 2003 and has undergone review to ensure our actions continue to achieve the strategy's three goals: safe, secure drinking water supplies; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy. The strategy also includes three strategic directions to achieve those goals: knowledge and research, water conservation and partnerships.

Water partners are empowered to support watershed stewardship across our province. At the provincial level, the Alberta Water Council provides policy advice to the government. Its 23 members are from governments, industry and non-governmental organizations. Alberta also has 11 watershed planning and advisory councils. These multi-sector organizations lead planning, report on the state of the watershed and advance water literacy at the watershed scale. At the local level, we have over 100 recognized watershed stewardship groups leading on-the-ground action and projects.

Alberta has two primary acts to protect our water and guide water use. The Water Act guides the allocation or withdrawal of fresh-water resources and the protection of rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands and groundwater. The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act supports the protection of the environment, including measures regarding water quality and pollution prevention. There are other acts that help manage water, such as the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, under which we've established water quality management frameworks, and the Fisheries Act, which supports the control of aquatic invasive species.

Our legislation includes provisions for establishing water management plans. These statutory plans are developed for water basins to guide regulatory decisions and approvals, establish minimum in-stream flow needs, outline conditions for diversions and set strategies for the protection of the aquatic environment.

To further manage land-use activities and cumulative impacts, Alberta also establishes environmental management frameworks for water. These are part of our land-use planning approach.

Underpinning our water management activities and decisions is our monitoring, evaluation and reporting program. It includes rivers and streams, lakes and reservoirs, surface water quality, wetlands and groundwater. Each area has a long-term monitoring approach enabling the evaluation of changes to conditions and the impacts of pressures over time. In many cases, these go back several decades. Monitoring programs are reviewed every five years, and provincial-scale condition-of-the-environment reporting is updated regularly. Our system is overseen by the Office of the Chief Scientist, who is appointed by the minister.

Alberta also recognizes and takes seriously transboundary interests. Headwaters protection and the management of resources are responsibilities we have to ensure the safety and security of water for our downstream neighbours. Water flows north to the territories, east to the other prairie provinces and south to Montana. We work closely with these jurisdictions through long-standing agreements to share and preserve the ecological integrity of cross-border waters.

We have a number of priorities to increase and maintain the availability of water to support various users in our province while still maintaining the highest standards of water conservation and treatment. We are undertaking new studies for reservoirs and storage, assessing water conservation efficiency and productivity and modernizing information systems to allow real-time digital information.

For drought, we've released a drought response plan for 2024. Major water users in the South Saskatchewan River basin have signed water-sharing agreements, and we've put forward legislative changes to enhance action during emergencies.

We're also investing \$125 million for new drought and flood water protection, about \$9 million for wetland replacement programs and \$3.5 million for watershed resiliency and restoration.

In closing, I'd like to mention the importance of provincial jurisdiction as the federal government reviews the Canada Water Act and establishes the Canada water agency. We hold different accountabilities: The Government of Alberta is the primary manager for water use, watershed management, water allocation, drinking water standards, source water protection and power development. The federal government's role focuses on other issues like international or interprovincial pollution, clean water for federally managed land, and fisheries, shipping and navigation.

It's critical for provinces to be at the forefront of any discussions where federal legislative updates may be considered that impact provincial jurisdiction. I encourage this committee to consider the roles that provinces and territories have as leaders and stewards of water as it works through its mandate.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide a very quick overview of our system.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Julian Kanigan (Assistant Deputy Minister, Environmental Management, Monitoring and Climate Change, Department

of Environment and Climate Change, Government of Northwest Territories): Thank you.

I appreciate the invitation to share with the committee today the Government of Northwest Territories' perspectives on the federal government's role in protecting and managing Canada's freshwater resources.

I wish to acknowledge that I'm situated today in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. These are treaty lands and home to many indigenous peoples, including the Yellowknives Dene, Tlicho and Métis, and I'm grateful to be on this land.

Freshwater monitoring and stewardship are key portfolios for the government in the Northwest Territories' Department of Environment and Climate Change, but much of the work that we do involves partnerships, including those with the federal government, mainly the Department of Environment and Climate Change, Natural Resources Canada and CIRNAC. We value these excellent partnerships and the support we receive from federal departments on freshwater initiatives, and we want to see them continue.

I want to provide you with some background NWT context before sharing our priorities regarding federal activities and investment in fresh water in the north.

As you likely know, the Northwest Territories is a very large land mass, coupled with a very small population of about 40,000 people spread out over 33 small communities. Devolution of Northwest Territories' lands and resources to the GNWT occurred in 2014, but federal investment in the north remains key.

Almost half of our residents are indigenous, and fresh water, in particular, is of great importance to all of the indigenous peoples of the NWT. When we speak about fresh water in the NWT, much of it is located in the Mackenzie River basin. That basin covers 1.8 million kilometres over five provincial and territorial jurisdictions. It's about 20% of Canada's land mass. It serves as a water source, but it's also a channel for transportation, for food, and for connection to culture and language for as long as people have lived on the lands that surround it.

As you know, rapid climate change has been affecting the NWT's freshwater resources for decades. Average annual air temperatures have risen up to 4°C in the northwestern NWT since the 1970s. Climate change modelling predicts that the Mackenzie Valley will continue to experience some of the greatest air temperature increases in the world in coming decades. We've experienced unprecedented extreme variability in water flow in the Northwest Territories over the last five years. As an example, water levels in the Great Slave Lake, a water body with a period of record over 60 years, went from very low in 2018 to very high, and then record highs in 2020 and 2022. Now we're down again to a record low in late 2023 and 2024.

Water levels on Great Slave Lake are determined by conditions upstream in the Mackenzie River basin, so these extreme conditions represent huge volumes of water, in the order of cubic kilometres, and this translates into many metres of exposed shoreline. However, more practically it means that if transportation goods can't be delivered by barge to remote communities, there's an increased cost of living for residents and to the GNWT. Some of the other experiences that we're facing are thawing permafrost and an increase in historic flooding events, as seen in some of the photos provided, as well as an increase in the frequency and size of wildfires, based on levels of drought never seen before in NWT forests.

Because of these new extremes, it's very difficult to predict how the Mackenzie River basin will respond in the future under different climate warming scenarios. NWT does have some of the largest bodies of water in the world. We're seeing big changes. Research, science and partnerships with indigenous knowledge-holders are critical for understanding and mitigating these changes. One key point I'd like to make is that increased federal support in freshwater research and monitoring is essential.

Through the Canada water agency and funding through the freshwater action plan, we would like to see federal support for a northern climate water hub. No such hub exists in the north, and Yellowknife would provide a central location for the entire Mackenzie basin. This hub could be a base for critical research on climate change and its impacts on fresh water, encouraging collaboration among scientists, indigenous knowledge-holders and policy-makers, and it would be responsive to the NWT's unique co-management regulatory system for land and water decision-making.

I also want to highlight the role of the Mackenzie River Basin Board and the need for increased federal support there. The federal government plays a key role in convening provinces and territories through the board, which was created in 1997 through the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement between the Government of Canada, Saskatchewan, Alberta, B.C., Yukon and NWT, but its potential has been limited by a lack of resources. We see that an increase in staff and financial capacity for the board's secretariat could enable greater research and community engagement while allowing provinces and territories to focus on the implementation of their own bilateral agreements.

• (1730)

Finally, the federal government, through Environment and Climate Change Canada, plays a key role in regulating the lower Athabasca oil sands. The federal government is now considering

developing regulations that would allow the release of oil sands-treated effluent.

As you know, the NWT is downstream of these potential releases. As you may imagine, NWT residents have a deep concern about this possibility, so strong regulation of oil sands is critical for our downstream interests.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to have to stop there and go to Ms. Jirousek, who is splitting her time with Mr. Mulligan. Is that correct?

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Heather Jirousek (Director, Water Resources, Department of Environment, Government of Yukon): We represent the Government of Yukon's water resources branch, which is responsible for water monitoring, policy, flood forecasting and providing water-related expertise to mitigate impacts to Yukon's water.

I'm Heather Jirousek, director of the water resources branch with Yukon's Department of Environment. Joining me is Brendan Mulligan, the senior scientist for groundwater with the water resources branch. As mentioned, we will co-present.

We are joining from the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. We partner with all Yukon first nations on various water initiatives.

We would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to provide our input to this process today.

In the Yukon, climate change is resulting in significant impacts to water systems. One example is flooding, where we have seen three consecutive years of record flooding in the territory, resulting in real impacts and hazards for people living in the Yukon. With climate change-induced increases to extreme weather patterns, ongoing changes to flood risk are expected across the territory.

The brief that we've submitted outlines seven theme areas as opportunities to tailor the federal role to best advance collaborative stewardship of water in a way that we think benefits the Yukon and all Canadians. Today, we will shed water on four of these themes, starting with supporting the understanding of groundwater.

Mr. Brendan Mulligan (Senior Scientist, Groundwater, Water Resources, Department of Environment, Government of Yukon): Thank you, Heather.

Groundwater is a critical resource in the Yukon. Ninety-seven per cent of Yukoners depend on groundwater as a potable water source, making us the second-most groundwater-dependent jurisdiction in Canada, after Prince Edward Island. Of course, groundwater is not only critical to humans, but it sustains ecosystems by maintaining water levels, regulating temperatures and delivering nutrients to rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands.

In recent years, the population of the Yukon has grown faster per capita than that of any other jurisdiction in Canada. Groundwater monitoring and aquifer mapping and characterization are increasingly important as our groundwater use increases and as various pressures increase the potential for adverse impacts to groundwater availability and quality.

Our branch of the Yukon government is fortunate to have long-standing, effective agreements with the Government of Canada concerning surface water quality and quantity monitoring. Despite the critical importance of groundwater, our government has no such agreement with the Government of Canada concerning groundwater monitoring or aquifer mapping and characterization.

Our first recommendation is for the governments of Canada and Yukon to enter into an agreement under the Canada Water Act to provide for programs to collect, process and provide data on the quality, quantity, distribution and use of groundwater. This is consistent with the recommendation made in a brief that this committee received from the International Association of Hydrogeologists.

Our second recommendation is to consider a cost-sharing agreement with the geological survey of Canada to support aquifer mapping and characterization in the Yukon.

• (1735)

Ms. Heather Jirousek: Our fourth theme that's provided in the brief is transboundary water management. Yukon shares borders with Northwest Territories, British Columbia and Alaska. There are a variety of arrangements in the Yukon and neighbouring jurisdictions that support transboundary stewardship at the watershed scale. However, our largest watershed, which is the Yukon River watershed, has no formal transboundary water management arrangement.

Recommendations five and six in our brief are for the Government of Canada to support multi-stakeholder and rights holder watershed discussions for the Yukon River and to consider the establishment of an international joint commission board or similar arrangement to support coordinated stewardship of the Yukon River.

We are actively involved in water management agreements in the Mackenzie River basin, which is a priority watershed in the federal freshwater action plan. Recommendation 12 in our brief is that federal funding should be made available as soon as possible for freshwater projects in the Mackenzie River basin.

Theme number five in our brief is understanding and aligning Government of Yukon and indigenous treaty rights. First nations are a key partner in governance in the Yukon and are taking leadership in water stewardship and monitoring in the territory. Indigenous knowledge systems are valid and powerful ways of knowing the world and knowing water, yet most agencies were founded in a time when this knowledge was not recognized as it is now. Recommendation seven in our brief is that the review of the Canada Water

Act needs to be aligned with modern treaties in the Yukon. Federal legislation needs to make space for the recognition of indigenous-led water strategies and the role of indigenous land guardians in contributing to water data monitoring networks.

The sixth theme is climate change adaptation and flood risk information. I began our remarks by emphasizing the impacts of recent flooding in the Yukon. To ensure resilience to flood risk in our changing climate, we need to ensure that our forecasts are supported by sufficient monitoring data and that resources are available to ensure that flood hazard maps are generated reliably and used to support resilient communities.

Recommendation nine in our brief is to ensure that work towards a national strategy on flood and drought is informed by the realities of a northern and small jurisdiction and understands the importance of supporting network expansion to meet data requirements for forecasting.

Finally, recommendation 10 in our brief is to continue to advance the delivery of the flood hazard and identification mapping program and consider additional work to develop resources to support jurisdictions in the flood resilience work necessary upon completion of flood hazard maps.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move on to the rounds of questions.

Mr. Kram, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Kram: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for joining us.

I've often said that one of the most enjoyable parts of this job is that we get to meet people from far and wide—from different parts of this country. That certainly includes the territories today.

A couple of months ago, the committee heard from representatives—also from the Yukon Territory—of Western Copper and Gold about their Casino mine project northwest of Whitehorse, which is going to be one of the largest critical mineral mines in Canada once it's complete. According to the company's literature, they've applied for a water use licence from the territorial government.

I am wondering if the witnesses from the Yukon Territory could share with the committee the regulatory approval process that is currently in place for new mines such as this.

Ms. Heather Jirousek: In our branch, we provide expert advice on assessment processes. The Casino mine will need to go through various processes in order to be permitted for those activities. Brendan, as our senior scientist of groundwater, is one of the experts within our branch who would review the project and provide input in terms of any impacts on and mitigation for groundwater. We would do the same in regard to surface water quality, water balance, water levels and the amount of water.

Our branch reviews those, but we are not the regulatory board. The Yukon Water Board is responsible for that. The board is represented by one-third federal government, one-third Yukon government and one-third first nations in the Yukon.

Brendan, is there anything you would add to that?

Mr. Brendan Mulligan: Thanks, Heather.

Yes, I would add that any proponent would first need to go through assessment under the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act. This is federal legislation that applies here and is administered by the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board, or YESAB, as we call it. Following that assessment, a water-use licence could be pursued from the Yukon Water Board, which Heather referenced.

In this instance, my understanding is that the proponent is somewhere in the YESAB process.

• (1740)

Mr. Michael Kram: You described the “one-third, one-third, one-third” arrangement that is in place. What can we do to make sure the federal government is not the slow third or squeaky wheel, so to speak, so that projects can move forward in the Yukon Territory?

Ms. Heather Jirousek: That's a good question.

I believe the people who represent the federal government on the Yukon Water Board are here. I'm sorry. We are not part of the Yukon Water Board, so we're not really sure how that works. Certainly, within the Yukon government, we provide our expertise and input on those issues.

Brendan, from a groundwater perspective, you may know of colleagues and whether or not they provide input on some of those technical issues. Perhaps that's something you're able to speak on.

Mr. Brendan Mulligan: Thanks, Heather.

The only comment I would add is that, as far as I can tell, the federal government participates in the socio-economic and environmental assessment process under YESAB.

However, at least in recent years, they seem to have limited participation in the water-use licensing process. They are represented on the Yukon Water Board, but they haven't provided technical interventions in that process in recent years. I know they did that previously.

Mr. Michael Kram: You mentioned in your opening statements the Canada water agency playing a positive role when it comes to groundwater in the Yukon.

Could you elaborate for the committee on what exactly that would look like and why the Canada water agency could play a useful role, instead of just having the territorial government do it all?

Mr. Brendan Mulligan: I can attempt to field that question.

Heather, please feel welcome to add to my response.

Despite heavy reliance on groundwater as a potable water source, as I mentioned in my remarks, we have very limited capacity to understand our hydrogeological conditions here. Our groundwater program was formally established just 10 years ago, so it's very young. We've added a few staff, but we have a very small team. We very much rely on partnership with academics, federal government, first nations, municipal governments and consultants to advance our agenda.

However, we've had limited support on groundwater from the federal government to date. Because of hydrogeological capacity, as I understand it, the federal government is spread across multiple departments. There are hydrogeologists working in Environment and Climate Change Canada, NRCan and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The CWA could play a role to help break down those silos and have those experts supporting people like us who need it.

As I mentioned, we receive considerable support from Environment and Climate Change Canada, in particular on surface water quality and quantity monitoring. However, there is no such support on the groundwater front, and that would be very welcome.

Mr. Michael Kram: Finally, just very quickly, it has been proposed that connecting the power grids of Yukon Territory and the province of British Columbia could have environmental and economic benefits. It would be related to B.C.'s Site C hydro dam, which obviously would affect water policy as well. I'm wondering if you could briefly provide for the committee what some of the economic and environmental benefits would be of such a proposal.

The Chair: That's a pretty big question, actually, and we're out of time. Would you be able to send something in writing?

Ms. Heather Jirousek: That's certainly not part of what we work on, but we could follow up on that question.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Longfield.

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

Thank you to the witnesses. I echo Mr. Kram's comments that it's so great to have representatives from such a vast territory in front of us today, virtually. Thank you all for your work in the area of water.

I want to start around the science and the comments Mr. Kanigan made around having a science centre in the north. I also sit on the science and research committee. We're looking at how to support northern science and how to support Arctic science in having centralized science centres.

Water seems to be a big potential for us to be looking at in terms of having a centre. Could you expand on that just a bit for this study?

Mr. Julian Kanigan: I think it's been described before that if climate change is like the shark, then water is the teeth. That's one of the first places where we're seeing some of the effects. That's why, from a Northwest Territories perspective, we're interested in that intersection between climate change and fresh water.

We have an opportunity in the Mackenzie basin to bring together some pretty unique things. I mentioned that we have a unique co-governance model in Northwest Territories with indigenous governments. There's an ability to bring forward traditional or indigenous knowledge with western science in a place where researchers can come and actually experience that.

I think part of it is about the research, and part of it is about having a physical location. We have a good example of such a place in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, where a lot of researchers come. It's the Western Arctic Research Centre, or WARC. Having something like that in Yellowknife where researchers can come as a destination makes a lot of good sense. Yellowknife is a good place for it, too, because it is a logistical hub. It's easy to get to.

We are experiencing, as I mentioned, climate change at quite a significant rate compared with the rest of the world and compared with the rest of the Arctic. It's a good place to study climate change.

• (1745)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I wasn't going to go down this road, but you've just tempted me. Natan Obed was one of our witnesses this morning. He talked about north-south governance and how a lot of the governance with the Inuit communities is with the provinces below them, in the south of them, and about the complexity of that arrangement that the federal government has made over decades, a century, versus having north-to-north governance.

Could you speak about the importance of collaborating with north-to-north discussions so that the people in the area are the ones who are directly involved?

Mr. Julian Kanigan: Thanks. I think you raise a really important point. It's the way we do business in the Northwest Territories. There's no way for a government of the Northwest Territories to proceed without the partnership and collaboration of indigenous governments in the territory or in the region that we're talking about. It's just the way things proceed.

The co-management system was developed in the late nineties and then instituted in the early 2000s. That's one step in the progression. I think we're just moving along with UNDRIP legislation and moving forward in terms of reconciliation.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I have a limited amount of time here, and I want to talk about how the path of reconciliation has been faster in some areas than others. Science is one of the slowest areas,

which is one of the surprising things. Indigenous traditional knowledge, particularly, in this case, around water, hasn't been included in our funding formulas, as an example.

Could you maybe expand on that a little as well, just so that we can try to get a sense of how important it is to be working on reconciliation as it relates to water and water science?

Mr. Julian Kanigan: Thanks. I'll take it back to a really practical example. We're talking about the Mackenzie River Basin Board and some bilateral agreements. The governments in the Northwest Territories and Alberta have a bilateral agreement for our shared waters, and one of the parts of that agreement is that we'll value and use traditional or indigenous knowledge on par with western science. It's easy to commit to that, but it's harder to actually put it into practice, and we've had this agreement since 2015. We're only now getting to the point where we're really taking the steps that are needed to get there. What it has involved is first building an ethical space with indigenous government representative partners, to have those conversations, and then working at their pace and their scale to understand what the tools are. We started off with the idea of a framework, but it's morphed into something else.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: As the Canada Water Agency is looking at the Mackenzie basin, could you, for the record, let us know how important it is that this discussion we're having be included with discussions with indigenous communities as they look at the Mackenzie?

The Chair: We have to stop to vote now. You have five seconds if you want, Mr. Kanigan, or you can send an answer in writing.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: It says 10 seconds on my clock, but I forgot about the other clock.

The Chair: Yes. We'll be right back. We have to take a couple of minutes to vote. I'll suspend.

• (1745)

(Pause)

• (1750)

[Translation]

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here for this meeting.

I'm going to start with Ms. Rich. Then I'll go to Mr. Kanigan, who talked about the oil sands earlier. I want to share some data about that with him.

Ms. Rich, I have a two-part question.

About a year ago, as part of this study, we had Chief Adam of the Chipewyan First Nation and Chief Tuccaro of the Mikisew First Nation here. During their testimony, they told us about the toxic spill that occurred at the Kearl mine. They also told us that Imperial was not the only party involved; the Government of Alberta and, of course, the Government of Canada were involved, too.

Furthermore, in 2023, your regulatory agency confirmed that, in 2022 alone, four oil companies operating in the oil sands used more than 200 billion litres of fresh water for eight projects.

In 2024, the Alberta government produced a presentation on drought and risk management. The presentation focuses on drought problems and indicates that the watersheds and tributaries of nine rivers are all considered to be in a state of serious water shortage. It goes on to say that, in the absence of heavy rainfall, spring water levels are expected to be disastrous.

All Albertans depend on water as a resource. It is essential to their health, to the survival of indigenous communities and to the survival of ecosystems.

So here's my question. Have you analyzed conflicts over the use of this resource, taking into account protection of the environment, health and the economy?

• (1755)

[*English*]

Ms. Kate Rich: There's a lot in there, but I will start by noting that our water for life strategy recognizes that we need to use water for three main purposes. I went through the goals, but it really is for people, for the aquatic environment, of course, and for our economy. We do think about that in our management of water.

I'll start with oil and gas and then maybe add some things on drought, if that's okay.

To be fair, I want to note that oil and gas water use is highly regulated in Alberta. We actually have a policy that we've had since 2006. It's a water conservation policy whereby we ask that water licenses be issued for anything only when there's sufficient water for existing users.

That said, in particular, we have a water conservation policy for upstream oil and gas. It asks that no freshwater resources be used unless it is necessary. I just want to be clear: Whether it's reuse of water or whether it is saline sources, that is our policy first and foremost.

In the oil sands mining sector, in 2022, I think we had a drop of intensity of freshwater use of about 20% since 2013. On average, about 76% of the water used in the oil sands is recycled. That is a really important part of our policy.

I also mentioned that, like other regions of Canada, we go through cycles—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Sorry to interrupt, but the fact remains that oil sands exploitation uses fresh water. We know there will be a water shortage due to climate change. You're telling me that the water is recycled and that there are tailings ponds, but there are also toxic spills. That water is not recoverable. I'd like to give you a chance to

provide a clear answer about the conflict between the health of the first nations' environment near the Kearl mine and the economy.

[*English*]

Ms. Kate Rich: I want to be clear that about three-quarters of the water used in the mine water sense is recycled. I think the water that we withdraw is less than 1% of the annual flow of that river. That is because we do encourage the recycling and reuse of said water through operations to minimize any withdrawal.

I think you're also talking about water use and management of tailings as well, which is a little bit separate. I want to be clear that for our oil sands, mine water and tailings reclamation policy, we do look at all the monitoring and everything associated with that. We have our oil sands environmental monitoring program in Alberta, which is a \$50-million-per-year program that is overseen and implemented, not just by the Government of Alberta and Environment and Climate Change Canada but also by indigenous communities in the region and by industry. It also includes monitoring of air, land, water, etc., which is an important feature for us and includes community-based monitoring.

When we look at—

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'm going to stop you there again, madam, because Mr. Kanigan said earlier that the Northwest Territories is located downstream of the oil sands. That means they are directly affected by the use of oil sands processed water and by water shortages. That's what I got from what Mr. Kanigan said.

The Chair: We're out of time for an answer.

We'll go to Ms. Zarrillo.

[*English*]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): I wanted to talk a bit about the next generation of resource extraction, as I know that Yukon has committed some dollars to some exploration as well.

As the demand for critical minerals rises, what steps are being taken by the Yukon government to ensure the water needed for mining does not interfere with freshwater security? How does that fit with Yukon's legal obligations to first nations, those legal obligations that are unique to Yukon?

Ms. Heather Jirousek: I'm sorry, can I have you repeat the question? There are a couple of questions in there, and I'd like to write them down.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Sure.

In terms of the critical mineral extraction, what steps are being taken by your government to ensure that the water needed for mining does not interfere with freshwater security?

I'm also interested to know more about how that fits with Yukon's legal obligations to first nations. I think those legal obligations are unique for Yukon compared to other parts of Canada, so I'm interested in some information on that.

Ms. Heather Jirousek: Starting with the first one, ensuring that water needs are there, as both Brendan and I talked about, there's the YESAB process for assessing a project, and then there's a water licence process. Through that process, we have the opportunity to provide input on those applications, water use and deposit of waste. At least, in terms of what we can do in our branch, we can provide input on any of the impacts that we see and suggest mitigations for that. That's one part of the process.

Then, in regard to legal obligations to first nations, again, first nations are on the decision-making board for the water board. There are different elements within final agreements—in chapter 14 of the final agreement, which is specific to water—that talk about the quantity, quality and rate of flow, if that is to be altered in a traditional territory. There are elements of it that are protected.

In terms of the legislative part, honestly, that's not something that we work with every day, and we would refer to the Yukon Water Board or the aboriginal relations branch to provide input on stuff like that. That's the information that I can provide, unless Brendan has anything else to offer there.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'm going to go ahead. I just want to ask a bit about community consultation on that. We know that the first generation of resource extraction in this country didn't have a lot of regulation around the use of fresh water, and we know that first nations were impacted. We also know that it's a gender issue, that women are disproportionately impacted by the lack of fresh water.

I'm wondering if there is community consultation around water when certain mining projects are funded or decided on. Is there community consultation with first nations women and how it impacts their lives?

Ms. Heather Jirousek: Again, we provide one piece of the assessment process. Certainly, when there is a big project like Casino or projects like that, there would typically be a public hearing, and it's a public event where interveners, including technical staff like Brendan, would attend to provide input around impacts.

I do believe—and Brendan, maybe you can add in here—that certainly the company would typically set up something with the first nation government and have ongoing consultation meetings through that process, but, again, we're just an outside player in the process.

Certainly through YESAB and the water board process, there are consultation processes, but the degree to which they engage I'm not sure about.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I probably don't have time for more than one more question, but I want to ask how the Canada water agency

has ensured that those northern voices and indigenous voices have been heard.

• (1805)

Ms. Heather Jirousek: Yes, we were certainly engaged in the process in 2020, when we were first engaged on it, and in 2021. Both Julian and I were northern panellists on a regional presentation that we provided through the Canada water agency.

Yes, we have been providing input. We provided, I think, about 20 pages' worth of comments, many of which we provided here in our brief today, regarding groundwater and transboundary issues. We certainly provided that input to the Canada water agency process.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Are there any bilateral agreements that would be relevant around freshwater that this committee should know about?

Ms. Heather Jirousek: Absolutely. Yes, we have a bilateral agreement with the national hydrometric program, the Water Survey of Canada. We have a bilateral agreement on surface water, and we would love to see a similar agreement on the groundwater side of things. We have had that agreement in place, I think, since the 1970s, and it's a very important agreement for us. We would like to see that on water quality and groundwater as well.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: All right.

Mr. Chair, do I—

The Chair: We're pretty much done. You have 15 seconds.

We will go into our second round with Mr. Leslie for five minutes.

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

I will start with Ms. Rich with the Government of Alberta.

This is perhaps an opportunity, recognizing that it is a municipal issue, but it has been all over the news over the past few days, so perhaps you might have a bit of an update regarding the situation of water availability for drinking and other purposes within the city of Calgary.

Secondary to that is whether or not you have any recommendations to the federal government relating to water infrastructure challenges and ways to address future issues such as what we're seeing happening right now.

Ms. Kate Rich: Thanks for recognizing the people of Calgary and the work that they're going through on a boil water advisory and a water shortage due to some infrastructure issues that they have going on. I can assure you that the city itself, as well as others, is working hard to repair that and making sure communication is out there to keep...and protect the safety of Albertans. I should note it's actually quite rare to have any boil water advisory in Alberta, so I think it also takes a bit of attention there, but it does show the continuous need to maintain and enhance our infrastructure. That is one of those areas we look at, and you rightly point to, to ask whether there are some areas where we need to look at the agency or the Canada Water Act—probably more so the agency than the act.

Obviously, there's federal-provincial coordination on information and knowledge sharing in science, which is what you've heard from others, but prioritizing and, frankly, sustained and increased funding for critical infrastructure is a really important piece for provinces like Alberta, whether it's for drinking water systems and regional systems like that, or storage and reservoirs. We heard about changing climate and adaptation and that the need to look at and modernize our infrastructure is really important, and that's founded in everything, from investing not only in research and knowledge networks for freshwater science but also, dare I say, in clean technology for efficiency, conservation and other purposes. However, it is really sustained and long-term investment.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you for that, Ms. Rich. Maybe I'll just stick with you regarding what I don't think was discussed today but certainly was brought up by my colleague and the Government of Saskatchewan. I know Alberta has undertaken or is undertaking major expansions to irrigation projects in the province, including, I think, covering existing canals, among other things. I'm wondering if you might be willing to expand on some of the projects, how they're being funded and/or supported by the federal government and why the province is taking such a strong direction to enhance the irrigation capabilities for farmers across the province.

Ms. Kate Rich: I may have to get back to you with the details of exactly what is funded by the province versus the federal government, so we will get back to you in writing.

I assure you that we do continue to invest. Not only is the Government of Alberta investing in expanded irrigation infrastructure, but it is very much committed to conservation-efficient and productive water use, meaning we'd like to get more bang for the buck out of each drop of water invested. We have, starting in 2004-05, really made enhancements throughout our irrigation networks to improve any leaks or drips...or systems to really enhance the productivity of what we get to make sure that every drop is used, so we do continue to expand our irrigation infrastructure.

I will have to get back to you on federal versus provincial funding.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you. I'll stick with you but expand to the other witnesses here regarding the Canada water agency and some of the engagement you have or have not had. I know, Ms. Rich, you mentioned the critical role of understanding the role of the federal government versus the provincial government, particularly in terms of regulation and what jurisdictional boundaries should and should not be crossed. Ms. Rich, what sort of engage-

ment has the federal government had with you, your department or the Government of Alberta more broadly in terms of what the Canada water agency is anticipated to do and what it could do? What are your views on how that has progressed thus far?

• (1810)

Ms. Kate Rich: Our engagement has been limited to date, I would think a handful or a few meetings, recognizing that we're trying to be patient and know that these things take time. We recognize that Canadians expect us to respect our jurisdictional division of powers, the Constitution, our authorities and our existing systems, and want these investments to be made in enhancements, not duplication. We look at opportunities for, as I mentioned, facilitating information sharing and knowledge, prioritizing funding for infrastructure and the like. However, we want to avoid duplication, to maintain clarity between provincial jurisdiction and federal policies and ensure, frankly, that our jurisdiction is involved.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mrs. Chatel, you have the floor.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for coming here to wrap up our study on water.

Ms. Jirousek, you mentioned earlier that the groundwater issue is important for the Yukon, and all the more so because of climate change. It's an important issue for the farmers in my riding and across Canada, too. There are a number of challenges and concerns. I think you were saying earlier that we need more data.

Can you tell us about what data are needed and what the Canada Water Agency can do to help collect groundwater data? In concrete terms, how would that help you?

[English]

Ms. Heather Jirousek: I will defer that one to Brendan Mulligan. As our senior scientist on groundwater, he's the best-placed person to answer.

Mr. Brendan Mulligan: Thank you, Heather.

As I think I mentioned in our opening remarks, one of our recommendations is a cost-sharing agreement with the Geological Survey of Canada, because mapping the aquifers underlying our communities, which supply us with groundwater, is a critical and foundational hydrogeological step that we've yet to take in most communities in the Yukon. I know there's considerable capacity within NRCan to support that capacity that's lacking in the Government of Yukon.

We also noted a recommendation to enter into an agreement under the Canada Water Act to support us with groundwater monitoring. We have a fairly robust groundwater monitoring network, but it's not supported by the federal government, unlike our surface water quality and quantity monitoring networks, and I think we could do quite a bit more work with some federal dollars.

In particular, drilling observation wells to understand groundwater levels and chemistry is a very expensive task. We have limited budgets to be able to expand our observation well network to provide critical information in places of need. Therefore, additional resourcing to be able to drill new wells to expand our network to provide critical data for decision-makers is something that would be welcome.

Ms. Heather Jirousek: I'd like to add that this is actually an important federal role. It's transboundary. It's related to climate change. This is information that supports not just Yukoners but all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Mulligan.

Ms. Jirousek, thank you for the additional information.

Ms. Rich, I'll continue along the same lines. Our farmers need groundwater. It's essential. Your province is experiencing a water shortage, as is mine, Quebec. We're worried. We want agriculture to be sustainable and resilient in spite of climate change.

Would groundwater data collected by the Canada Water Agency enable scientists to help our farmers?

• (1815)

[*English*]

Ms. Kate Rich: Thanks. I'm just waiting for the translation, so I apologize for the delay.

Yes, groundwater is an area we are continuing to invest in as a province. We would always welcome more information and more collaboration to better understand water systems as a whole, including the interaction of groundwater and surface water in some of those shallower aquifers. We have enhanced our investments in inventories and monitoring for groundwater across Alberta, but especially in the south.

We have put more resources into this in budget 2024, and we would certainly welcome that, not only for farmers but, frankly, for any user in Alberta.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sophie Chatel: Mr. Kanigan, people say your government set the standard for watershed co-management. Your government

has worked not only with the province, but also with municipalities and indigenous communities.

Can you tell us about the methods you used that could serve as a model for watershed collaboration?

The Chair: Please answer the question fairly quickly.

[*English*]

Ms. Kate Rich: I'm just checking if that's directed to Alberta.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sophie Chatel: My question was for the Northwest Territories representative.

Ms. Kate Rich: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Julian Kanigan: Thank you.

I think the coal management processes that are in place in the Northwest Territories, again, stem from settled land claims—the Inuvialuit, Gwich'in and Sahtu land claims that were settled in the early 1990s—and then there was legislation produced known as the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

With respect to fresh water, one of the key principles is that ecological integrity is maintained for the ecosystem. When coal management boards that are formed in a similar way to what Heather was describing in the Yukon—with different representatives from Canada, from the territories and from indigenous governments—are making decisions about projects, they're making them with those principles in mind.

The Chair: Thanks.

I have to go now to Madame Pauzé, but I think she wants to continue that line of questioning.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Yes, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kanigan, my colleague, Mrs. Chatel, asked you the question I had for you.

A number of people who testified as part of our study have talked to us about integrated watershed management. Your practices have been described as exemplary. The Northwest Territories and Yukon have renewed their commitments to jointly managing and monitoring watersheds that straddle the Yukon and the Northwest Territories border. I'm impressed by these long-term highly collaborative commitments.

In your opinion, will the arrival of the Canada Water Agency have a positive or negative impact on your management?

[English]

Mr. Julian Kanigan: I think the governments of the territories are perhaps in a different situation from provinces, as I described at the beginning of my presentation, in that the federal government has devolved certain functions, but there are other functions that are still held by the federal government. We do rely very much, because of these small populations and a low tax base, on federal funding. We really see a Canada water agency and a freshwater action plan as an opportunity for us to collaborate with federal government partners to achieve some of the objectives that we and our indigenous government partners would like to do.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: If I understand correctly, you're still taking a collaborative approach.

Mr. Kanigan, you mentioned the oil sands. However, Alberta says that it is currently at water shortage management stage 4 out of 5. Some rivers have severe water shortages.

Does that affect you?

[English]

Mr. Julian Kanigan: As I mentioned, we do have a transboundary water agreement with Alberta. One of the key pieces of that agreement is about how we share water and what the triggers or the objectives are for when that water quantity is lower and may be impacting the ecological integrity of the aquatic ecosystem.

We're working through one of those processes right now. We have low water levels in the Mackenzie basin, and, for example, there are low water levels in the Hay River basin, which is a shared basin. We'll collaboratively move forward to understand what those interests are.

• (1820)

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Ms. Zarrillo, go ahead, please.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much. I'm going to carry on asking Mr. Kanigan some questions.

I wanted to go back to climate change, as it was mentioned today, and I would like to add to my question about groundwater, too. My NDP colleagues, including Laurel Collins from this committee, have been advocating for putting stronger freshwater protections in place to help prevent wildfires.

Could you please share with us here on committee what stronger freshwater and groundwater protections would mean for the Northwest Territories?

Mr. Julian Kanigan: One of the key learnings for me over the past number of years is that the drought we're currently experiencing in the Northwest Territories isn't related to water use. It's more about climate change. It's more about something that we've never seen before, which is a meteorological system that's over the entire basin. These drought codes that we're seeing are related to climate more than usage of water. We're seeing the water being passed across the border and into our jurisdiction. What we need to do is think more about climate change and how we will adapt to that in our management.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Do you see a role for the federal government to help in understanding and proactively preparing for this? I'm thinking even about natural infrastructure. Where can the Government of Canada and the new water agency assist in understanding this and helping with prevention?

Mr. Julian Kanigan: There are so many ways. I think one really clear way is this new regime whereby we have extreme variability; it's really hard to predict from year to year what's going to happen. We need new tools and new modelling to indicate what those conditions are going to be in the near and medium term, so we can better plan.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Are there experts out there? Are there countries or are there governments ahead of this that we could be looking to here in Canada?

Mr. Julian Kanigan: The Government of Northwest Territories is currently working with researchers at the University of Calgary to look at the current regime in the Mackenzie River basin. I know there are other experts within the country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Deltell, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, everyone. I'm very pleased with your participation in our great country, I must say. I agree with my colleagues that it's always a great pleasure to talk to people who live in the territories.

I had the pleasure and privilege of going to Yukon and the Northwest Territories. When I arrived in Yellowknife, I was told not to talk about Whitehorse. When I went to Whitehorse, I was told not to talk about Yellowknife. I immediately understood that, even in such a big space, there might be a little friction between two entities. As a guy from Quebec City, I definitely get that, especially when I think of my friends in Montreal.

Let's get back to a much more serious and important topic that was addressed earlier by one of my colleagues, Mr. Kram: hydroelectricity needs for major projects in the Yukon.

My questions are for the Government of Yukon representatives, Heather Jirousek and Brendan Mulligan.

Do you think Yukon might need energy from British Columbia? Is it possible to have exchanges or to allow entities in British Columbia to provide energy, and therefore electricity, to Yukon?

[English]

Ms. Heather Jirousek: I'll have to get back to the committee on this. This isn't an area we can speak to.

Yukon Energy, working together with.... There is another branch within the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources that works on this collaboratively, so we could certainly provide something back, but it's not anything that we're able to speak to. I'm sorry.

• (1825)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: We also know that, some years ago, the federal government used Bill C-69 to give itself the power to veto hydroelectric projects.

Of course that's a huge concern in Quebec because, over the decades and over the past century, we've developed lots and lots of dams, all without having to ask or beg for federal authorization. The results have been spectacular. We're world-renowned. We understand that your situation is different because you're territories, but even so, you've had the necessary authority to act autonomously since 2001 and 2014.

If by chance you needed access to hydroelectricity, could Bill C-69 get in your way, even though we know it's not necessarily the best place to build hydroelectric plants?

[English]

Ms. Heather Jirousek: I'm sorry. I wasn't quite clear on the end of that translation.

Again, anything related to hydroelectricity... Certainly we have hydro projects right now being renewed. They go through licensing and assessment.

I'm not familiar with the bill you're referring to.

Again, I'm sorry. I'm not able to answer that question.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: My last question will be for all of you.

We have to keep the first nations in mind all the time when we build something, when we talk about the future and when we talk about the water.

In your territories, you have more first nations compared to the *allochtone* people than in other provinces. In Quebec, yes, we have first nations, but not as many as you have, compared to the number of *allochtone* that we have in our province.

How do you deal with that? Also, how can you reach out in great agreement with a win-win partnership and partnership in prosperity? How do you get that?

The Chair: Who would like to take that?

Ms. Heather Jirousek: I'm happy to start on that.

Certainly, there are the environmental assessment, regulatory reviews and opportunities to provide input through that process. Maybe I can touch on areas that we are responsible for.

As an example, we're working together with the Northwest Territories and British Columbia right now. We have a bilateral management agreement on water. This is under the Mackenzie River Basin Board umbrella. We're developing a learning plan on the Liard River.

In doing so, we're working together with elders who have knowledge of water. We have contracted an elder who has expertise in this area. He has developed a land and peoples relationship model. His name is Joe Copper Jack. He has done this process in the Liard basin, where he has done an elders' circle collecting knowledge about water from the basin.

Bringing that into our processes, like land use planning and water planning, we're doing a learning plan on the Liard River. Before we do the western knowledge side of it, we're also finding out what knowledge is out there on water from an indigenous perspective and we're bringing that into the process.

The Chair: Thank you.

Last but not least, we have Mr. Ali for five minutes.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today for this very important study.

My question is for the official from Alberta.

As we all know, Alberta is currently seeing its worst drought in 40 years. What role does your department believe climate change is playing in the current drought? Can you expand on that, please?

Ms. Kate Rich: In the prairie provinces, we have had droughts before. We see severity and frequency issues. We have acknowledged that we see the need to integrate monitoring for a changing climate and its impact not only on water and drought but also on other systems throughout the province.

I believe there's acknowledgement of a linkage.

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

• (1830)

Ms. Kate Rich: This probably relates to similar things you've heard from others. It's about deepening our understanding of our supplies like groundwater and surface water with respect to a changing climate or other influences, whether it's growing demand or looking at efficiencies and other pieces there.

We see that we are continuing to invest in droughts, floods, groundwater mapping and lots of infrastructure as we think about a changing climate. As I noted, we think the Canada water agency has a role in bringing forward some sustained funding for infrastructure, science and other pieces.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

I'll ask a similar question of the Government of Northwest Territories official.

In your view, what role do you believe the Canada water agency can have in a Northwest Territories context?

Mr. Julian Kanigan: Thanks for the question.

Similar to Kate's answer, we're looking for increased support for research and monitoring, and for pursuing shared, collaborative objectives.

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

Mr. Julian Kanigan: I think it relates back to my comment that what we're seeing, in terms of climate change, is across the entire Mackenzie River basin. The Canada water agency, if it's situated to look at things on a basin scale, is in a unique position to address those basin-level effects, and then disseminate that information collaboratively among jurisdictions.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: I'll put that same question to the Government of Yukon official.

Ms. Heather Jirousek: Thank you for the question.

We have recommendation number 9 in our brief, which says, "ensure that work towards a National Strategy on Flood and Drought is informed by realities of northern and small jurisdictions and understands the importance of supporting network expansion to meet data requirements for forecasting."

That's similar to what the others were saying.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Is there anything else you want to add on the Yukon side regarding how the federal government should assist or support you in tackling climate change-related concerns you may have?

Ms. Heather Jirousek: Leveraging what jurisdictions are already doing in that arena is important.

There is a federal role in what we're doing with transboundary work right now. Transboundary is an area of federal jurisdiction, as well. How can we work together on those things, particularly at a watershed scale?

From a climate change and networks perspective, flooding has been impacting us in the last several years. How can the federal government support us in leveraging what they're doing? We know we have support from Environment Canada and NRCAN when it comes to flood mapping. How can they continue to support us in those sorts of things—forecasting, flood mapping, the things we're seeing, the hazards that are impacting Yukoners right now?

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

That brings us to the end of our witness testimony for this study.

I thank the witnesses for wrapping up our deliberations. I would also like to thank the committee members for their co-operation, enthusiasm and many interesting questions. The witnesses are welcome to stay, if they wish, since the meeting is still public. Once again, I thank them for being with us.

I have a couple of housekeeping items to discuss with members.

For Tuesday, we had planned to hold a four-hour meeting, divided into two two-hour periods, first to hear from the minister and then to discuss documents related to the net zero accelerator initiative. I have two things to say about that.

First, the minister will not be able to join us after all because he has to make a presentation to the cabinet. We can still meet with his officials for an hour. I'll open that up for discussion in a moment.

Second, the net zero accelerator initiative documents won't all be ready by June 18, because everything has to be translated and it's very complicated. I spoke to Mr. Mazier about this, and he agreed that we should look at this issue as soon as we come back in the fall. We would put it on the agenda for our first meeting. At that point, all the documents will be available in both official languages. Also, because the documents were supposed to be ready three days before June 18 so committee members could review them in camera, if we do it in the fall, they'll have more time to do that. Mr. Mazier agreed.

So what do we want to do on Tuesday? Do we want the officials without the minister?

I'm open to suggestions.

Mr. Leslie, you have the floor.

• (1835)

[English]

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

I will defer to Mr. Mazier and your conversation. I think it is reasonable to take the time necessary for official bilingualism to be respected and to have the documents properly translated. I think that's a reasonable perspective.

In terms of your question about what we might do at Tuesday's meeting, I certainly don't think that we should just take the day off, because we're heading a bit closer to summer.

I think it's worth reminding this committee that Simon Kennedy, the deputy minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, from whom we have now been in receipt of two letters.... The original letter was a blatant disregard of the original motion seeking the production of documents relating to the net-zero accelerator initiative.

When a committee orders the production of documents, deputy ministers don't get to pick and choose what documents they are allowed to send over to that committee. There are numerous Speakers' rulings related to the production of those documents. I mentioned them before in a previous conversation when we had the government overrule our ability to access documents.

In summary, whether it be Speaker Rota, Speaker Milliken or *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, on numerous occasions it has been highlighted that it is not only our duty and our obligation to ask for documents as a committee, but it is a right that we inherently hold as parliamentarians.

Now, the deputy minister has his own obligations. He's the deputy minister of a department, and his job is to defend the minister—and the government, more broadly speaking—but he can't just deny what a committee asks for or demands in terms of production, no matter what his arguments are. There was a recent example of the arguments he laid out, particularly in the second letter, as to why he is unwilling to provide the documents this committee has requested. The easiest comparable example is that, recently, Iain Stewart, the president of the Public Health Agency, was called to the bar in the House of Commons for failing to provide the Winnipeg lab documents. Now, Iain Stewart made the exact same arguments that the current deputy minister of Innovation—

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Zarrillo.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'm sorry. How long is this meeting going? I was under the impression that—

The Chair: We have until 7:07 p.m. Then we will have to adjourn the meeting. The resources will have run out.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Leslie.

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

I was just saying that Iain Stewart made those exact same arguments that Simon Kennedy is now using. I think we don't need to look far as to where that got him in terms of his own career and being reprimanded by the Speaker in the House of Commons.

The rural member for Milton is the parliamentary secretary. He's under a bit of a different obligation, so I understand where he's coming from, but he had the gall last meeting to openly criticize members of the Conservative Party for moving forward with a special meeting to deal with the government's failure to hand over those documents that we had sought originally. During that meeting, the member said our efforts were “silly and totally not necessary”, which, again, I believe was insulting to us but also to Ms. Pauzé and to Ms. Collins. We were talking about \$8 billion of taxpayer money that went to large companies. I think it was entirely reasonable for members of this committee—

• (1840)

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

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: If my quotes are going to be used out of context, then I'd like the opportunity to address them.

I said that an emergency meeting was not necessary, because it is not. Here we are—

The Chair: That's a point of debate.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: [*Inaudible—Editor*] half of this meeting talking about that.

The Chair: It's a point of debate.

What I would say is this. As I understand it, it's not that they don't want to produce the documents; it's that they can only get half the documents by the 18th. It's more productive for the committee

to just get all the documents and have time to look at them in camera. I think that's the issue here.

I'll let you continue, Mr. Leslie, but I believe the department is quite open to sharing the documents. They just need to be translated.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Well, I hope that's true. However, from the correspondence that we as a committee have received, that has not been the indication of the letters from Deputy Minister Kennedy. That may have been your direct correspondence with the—

The Chair: What did he say that made you doubt that they want to do that?

Mr. Branden Leslie: The first letter said that basically they're not handing any of this over, that it's cabinet confidence and that it has to be redacted. We came back with a second set of recommendations.

All of that is to say, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: If I may interrupt, that was because we hadn't proposed this in camera solution.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I think that goes to the point. We tried to be reasonable at the last meeting. This is what I'm driving at in terms of what we were going to have to do on Tuesday. If you'll allow me, sir, I think it shows that that meeting, in and of itself, was needed, because the committee did have to pass, with opposition support of all members, a motion to have the deputy minister realize the gravity of the situation and what we are demanding of him in terms of the production of the documents.

Without that meeting, without that motion passing at that meeting, we would not be even having this discussion. We would have just—

The Chair: Well, good for us.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Well, it is.

Again, that is our obligation as parliamentarians, and I'm proud of that. I'm proud of the colleagues at this side of the table. They were willing to go to bat for taxpayer dollars and ask tough questions of big companies about where \$8 billion went, and a lot of questions about whether or not emissions are going to be reduced by it. It's imperative for all parliamentarians—it doesn't really matter what your stripe is, at this point—to know where a bunch of money went and whether or not it's actually going to reduce emissions. I'm of the view that those attempts were, more or less, a breach of parliamentary privilege, but I don't want to go down that path. I think the department—in my hopes that you are correct—is willing to share the documents with us.

The motion we passed at the last meeting was fairly explicit in having two sections.

One was to get unredacted documents three days ahead of the meeting. We are willing to be flexible, as mentioned earlier, and have this meeting take place in the fall. I appreciate your willingness, Mr. Chair, to have those documents be available to members of Parliament and their staff whenever they become available, whether that's in July or August, but ahead of that September meeting. I appreciate that.

There was also a requirement that they produce a redacted version of those documents, because, as colleagues across the way are concerned about, we might inadvertently say something in a public meeting. I think that is a fair concern. That's why we were very explicit in the wording of our motion. We could have both of them side by side, so we could see what is redacted and what is not redacted. We were also accepting of the parliamentary secretary's amendments to that motion, which add the in camera part to respect those very specific concerns.

Now, the deputy minister, in his letter, tried to give a comparison to what the industry committee did, in the model of how they were kind of, sort of able to view the electric vehicle battery contracts in a very similar type of situation. I think, again, recognizing that this will take time, we are willing to go along with that. However, the word he used in that letter was "precedent". That's not the way this works. What the industry committee decides to do is completely separate from what this committee decides to do. Going back to those Speaker rulings I mentioned previously, any committee has the authority, the prerogative, the right and the desire to see transparency from this government. Frankly, it should be demanded.

All this to say, to answer your original question—and I apologize for the length—I think it is important that Canadians can see the difficulties we are having not only in viewing these contracts but also in having a full understanding of what the results of these contracts will be. Unless we are given the opportunity to view them and ask the deputy minister and his staff very pointed questions, we are not doing our job.

I think the compromise is to reschedule the meeting and have a two-hour meeting, as mentioned, in September.

I respect that Ms. Pauzé has been long awaiting the study on sustainable finance. I don't want to take away from that. I understand she would be concerned about that. I would be willing to offer that we add, within the first week, a third meeting where we can take a good, hard look at this and directly ask the deputy minister and his staff questions, rather than take away a meeting from the Bloc Québécois' study on sustainable finance.

• (1845)

The Chair: Mr. Leslie, I was consulting the clerk. What are you proposing?

Mr. Branden Leslie: It's a few things. I will get to the conclusion.

The first one is that, once we are back—as you suggested—we not take away from Ms. Pauzé's study, which was passed a long time ago. We add a third meeting for two hours, as per the motion, with Deputy Minister Simon Kennedy and officials, where we reject the idea he proposed about us taking on the specific model the industry committee used for the EV documents. We are our own

committee. We are fully within our prerogative to take our own approach, as per the motion we passed.

I think it's clear from the law clerk's letter this morning that it is our responsibility to not divulge information. Again, going back to what we did in camera on the motion, I think it's entirely reasonable. It behooves any parliamentarian, as our responsibility, to not make that mistake, particularly at a time when reports about election interference are running rampant and people are making mistakes. I think we're all cognizant of that. It's entirely reasonable to put that onus back on us.

However, we were very specific in the wording of the motion we passed during the emergency meeting. I think it struck the right balance, one that upholds our rights and privileges as members of Parliament and takes into account the constraints of official bilingualism the deputy minister outlined.

To your question about what we do on Tuesday, the minister is not appearing, which is disappointing—

The Chair: Can I get agreement from the committee to have a third meeting when we get back in September, assuming we get the resources and we can do it?

Are we in agreement that in the first week when we get back, instead of two meetings, we have a third meeting to deal with this, so we don't take anything away from whatever else we're doing at that point? We don't know exactly what we'll be doing in that first week, but is everyone okay with having a third meeting?

This is a question to the committee.

Mr. Adam van Koevorden: I just want to say that I respect and appreciate everything that the member opposite is saying, particularly when he emphasized that I'm a rural member. I like it when he reminds Canadians that Milton is a rural riding.

I have confidence in your and the vice-chair's ability to manage these types of things. We could do a really good job. I think we're going to come back and have meetings on this. There's no controversy here. We can have a meeting, or we can have two meetings, or we can even have three. I really want to get to the point of Madame Pauzé's study, but I don't think we have an issue here.

The Chair: Okay, good, that's settled.

What was your second point, about Tuesday?

Mr. Branden Leslie: What I think would be helpful heading into the summer—

The Chair: I'm sorry.

Mr. Longfield, do you want to say something about this?

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I wanted to give some direction for Tuesday, since it is coming. Before the end of this meeting, I would like to be able to—

The Chair: That's what we're on now.

Okay, can we talk about Tuesday? Then we can go to Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I'm more than happy to talk about Tuesday. What I think we should do, at least for one of the two hours, given that the minister is refusing to come to the meeting on the main estimates, is bring in the officials and ask them questions on the main estimates as we would anyway.

We have a second hour available, and I think it would be wise for us, heading into this break—

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Zarrillo.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'm sorry, but it is my first time visiting this committee. Is there not a subcommittee on this committee?

The Chair: We're trying to sort this out, because we can't realistically have a subcommittee meeting between now and Tuesday. I think we can come to a pretty good agreement.

Mr. Leslie, what's your suggestion for the second hour? You want the officials for the first hour.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Whether it's the first or the second hour—

The Chair: I think there's probably a broad agreement on that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Am I on the list?

• (1850)

The Chair: Yes, you are.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Okay. I have some suggestions.

The Chair: I'm trying to get a consensus before 7:07 p.m.

[*English*]

Is everyone okay with having the officials come in for the first hour?

Mr. Branden Leslie: Let's finish the other hour, and then we can talk about it together.

The Chair: Is everyone okay with having ECCC officials, without the minister basically?

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: For what?

The Chair: It's for the main estimates, one hour on Tuesday.

[*Translation*]

Is that okay?

During the first hour, we will hear from the officials, as planned, but the minister will not be here. That's all.

Let's move on to the second hour.

[*English*]

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

The second hour would be very beneficial. Before we head into the opportunity to read the redacted and unredacted versions of the contracts over the summer, there are still many outlying issues with the original motion, which contained three parts. The contracts

were just one of them. What I would recommend is that we bring in Deputy Minister Kennedy, alongside the commissioner of the environment, the initiator of our entire awareness as a committee, as Canadians, about this entire project, to ask them a series of questions so we can better understand, from their perspective, what good this program is doing. We are going to be, I would say, better placed come the fall for that third meeting, whenever it happens.

The Chair: Mr. Kennedy is not available on Tuesday the 18th.

When we come back in the fall, when we do that two-hour meeting, they're supposed to come for the first hour.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Do you not think it would it be reasonable for us to have the opportunity to ask questions so we are better prepared?

The Chair: It's a suggestion.

I'll go to Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I'm not trying to be—

The Chair: I'm trying to get a consensus.

What do you think, Mr. Longfield?

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I think Tuesday we could do drafting instructions for the report on the study we've just completed, so that the analysts can prepare over the summer. I think we have a really good outline that we are working with. There may be some additions. We've had lots of things around the Canada water agency. Maybe that's a theme that the analysts can work in, but we could talk about that in drafting instructions, so when we do break for the summer, they know what they are working on.

The Chair: That's a good point.

I'll go now to Mr. Deltell, because we're trying to get to a consensus in the next 10 minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I want to make sure I understand what you said earlier. Will Deputy Minister Kennedy be here next Tuesday?

The Chair: No, he won't be able to come. That's another issue.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: This is important, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I understand.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: In fact, that's why—

The Chair: I wasn't happy about it either.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: No, I'm really not happy about it either. He is, after all, the most senior public servant in the department's administration. If we want to do a good job with this, we need the top brass.

The Chair: He'll be with us in the fall for the first hour.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I understand, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry to put it this way, but I'm insulted.

The Chair: I understand.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: We know the minister. He's not chicken. My goodness, we've invited him two or three times now, and it's never the right time and we have to reschedule him every time.

I see him in the House. He's not on a mission abroad. He's not off in Zimbabwe saving the planet. He's here in Canada.

The Chair: He'll be in cabinet on Tuesday.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Why can't he find an hour to appear—

The Chair: I can't answer that.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: —before parliamentarians in committee?

The Chair: I can't answer that, but I hear you.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I'm very disappointed in the minister, to be honest. I know the man well, and I respect him, but I'm bitterly disappointed that he can't give us an hour of his time.

Let me tell you right now that, if he's in the House tomorrow, I'll go talk to him—

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: —and I'll try to convince him. I can't believe he can't find an hour.

The Chair: Well, if you do manage to convince him, he'll be here with the officials for the first hour.

Right now, we're discussing—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: You're still talking about public servants, Mr. Chair, but you're telling me that the most important public servant won't be here.

The Chair: No, I'm talking about Department of the Environment officials.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I have a great deal of respect for these people, but I would like the top official to be present.

It's not like I'm going to throw a temper tantrum.

The Chair: No. We're mixing up two officials.

We're talking about Mr. Kennedy, who's with Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada.

The officials who are supposed to be here on Tuesday with the minister, who won't be able to come, are with Environment and Climate Change Canada—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: We're talking about the net zero accelerator initiative.

The Chair: Yes, but I believe we're all set for the first hour. As planned, Environment Canada officials will be here without the minister.

Right now we're talking about the second hour.

Mr. Longfield proposed that we discuss the report on the water study so we can give instructions to the analysts so they can work over the summer.

Mr. Leslie suggested inviting Mr. Kennedy, but Mr. Kennedy has already told us that he can't come. I don't know about the environment commissioner, because we didn't invite him.

Ms. Pauzé, what is your suggestion?

• (1855)

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I have several.

A lot has been said, and I don't want to give a big speech. The only thing I want to say is that I don't entirely agree with Mr. Leslie. I think things have been blown out of proportion.

I thought the offer in Mr. Kennedy's letter was very reasonable. I believe he suggested that we do what was done at the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology. Everyone got that letter. I understand—

The Chair: Could you repeat that?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Kennedy wrote to us yesterday to say that the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology had received the same request we did for a study relating to the net zero accelerator initiative. I believe the Standing Committee on Public Accounts also received one. As far as I can tell, almost all the committees are studying the same topic. Let's not get carried away.

Mr. Kennedy is making the same offer to us as to the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology.

I agree with what Mr. Kennedy is proposing. I think it's very reasonable. Otherwise, I think we're getting carried away. We spent a lot of time at the last committee meeting agreeing to hold a two-hour meeting. Now Mr. Leslie is suggesting an extra hour.

The Chair: No. I believe the hour Mr. Leslie is proposing is the first hour of the two-hour meeting we will hold in the fall.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Okay.

The Chair: If I understand your comments correctly, you prefer Mr. Longfield's suggestion for the second hour.

We're set for the first hour.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I still have some suggestions. I'm not done, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You may continue.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: We aren't doing a study on the net zero accelerator initiative, especially since other committees have been given that responsibility. We need to calm down.

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*] in the fall.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Let's wait until the fall.

For Tuesday, is it too late to hear from witnesses in the second hour to continue the study on sustainable finance?

I have another suggestion. Is it too late to hear from the advisory group set up under the bill? I forget the bill number.

There are so many other possibilities as well.

The Chair: Okay, but what are we doing about the instructions for the analysts?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: In addition to that, there's Mr. Longfield's suggestion. If I understand correctly, we have three suggestions on the table.

The Chair: Okay.

Do you think that's important? Do we have any additional drafting instructions for the analysts to help them with the report on the freshwater study this summer? If not, it leaves us time for another topic in the second hour of the meeting.

[*English*]

We'll go to Ms. Pauzé, and then to Mr. Longfield.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'm not sure it's necessary. In the beginning, the analysts gave us a table with different themes. I imagine that's what they will use.

The Chair: Yes, that's right.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: We could take the second hour off. Just joking. Is it too late to have a panel of witnesses for the study on sustainable finance? It could also be the advisory group.

The Chair: We can try.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: A year ago, I asked that the committee hear from the advisory group, but that never happened.

The Chair: Okay.

Excuse me, but Ms. Taylor Roy and Mr. Longfield also want to speak.

[*English*]

If I could do a little summary here, I think the first hour is taken care of.

The question now is, what do we do in the second hour? Madame Pauzé is saying that we don't really need to give drafting instructions; it's pretty clear. She would like to continue with the finance study. Mr. Longfield had proposed drafting instructions.

We'll go to Ms. Taylor-Roy, and then Mr. Longfield.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: First, I propose that this be discussed by the subcommittee, not by the entire committee.

Second, I think that wrapping up what we've been doing, which is the freshwater study.... I understand that we had things laid out at the beginning, but we added witnesses, we did different things and a lot of things came up during the study. I do think it's been a very lengthy study and investment of this committee. Wrapping that up at the end of this session is probably a good idea, rather than beginning another study.

I still believe this should be a subcommittee meeting, not a committee meeting.

• (1900)

The Chair: It's just that we won't have time to do that.

Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I was going to say that if we run out the clock today, and it looks like that's what the intention of this meeting is, at least for drafting instructions we could start with the outline that we started with. I think that gives us a very good basis to start doing the work on the report.

If the other members don't want to add anything to that, because of not wanting to look at drafting instructions, I think at least it's fair to the analyst to work with the initial outline that we gave them.

The Chair: Okay, but what are we doing now? We have one proposal from Madame Pauzé. Do we try to do an extra hour on the finance study? Is it drafting instructions?

Mr. Branden Leslie: What if I offered a compromise between the two by adding a third option?

Given that the net-zero accelerator fund is funded through the main estimates, what if we brought in ISED officials alongside EC-CC for the first hour, and the second hour is to do drafting instructions?

The Chair: I don't know. I think we're mixing apples and oranges.

Mr. Branden Leslie: It's entirely reasonable.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: ECCC is who we're going to talk to. That's—

The Chair: I don't think there's consensus.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I am trying to help us work together.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: It seems that this side would rather discuss the water report.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I will go along with that suggestion.

The Chair: Okay.

That takes care of the first hour of the meeting. In the second hour, we will discuss the water report. Our two-hour meeting would then be complete. That's what I propose.

[*English*]

Is everyone good? Do we have UC?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, have a good evening.

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