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• (1100)

[English]

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

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have a quick point of clarification, if I may.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I would just like to start by asking if we have any updates from Minister Guilbeault or officials on when they'll be attending. My understanding is that they were asked. I think we need to understand from an environmental standpoint what the purpose is of their current plan of destroying the forestry industry and upending communities, and whether or not they've looked at other options that include maternal penning or predation control.

When will the minister be appearing to explain? Secondly to that, what role will this set of meetings have in the ongoing consultation that's slated to end on September 15? I just want to understand when the minister will be appearing so that we can ask very important environmental-related questions and about the jobs that will be impacted by this overbearing decision from the minister.

The Chair: We're working on getting the minister in for the 18th. I don't know if it's absolutely confirmed, but I'm hopeful that he'll be here the 18th of September.

Mr. Branden Leslie: So after the consultation ends, the minister will appear before this parliamentary committee.

The Chair: He'll be here. I'm working on getting him here on the 18th, yes.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Is there any chance we could have him before the consultation ends?

The Chair: I don't believe so. We tried, but I don't think we were able to get him earlier.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Is he completely unavailable for the next two weeks?

The Chair: I can't speak for him. I can speak for myself, and I tried hard.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I would like the minister to try hard to explain this decision and why he's upending communities and destroying jobs in Quebec.

The Chair: Well, let's not prejudge the committee's conclusions.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I've just listened to the testimony, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes. Okay.

[Translation]

I welcome the members of the committee as well as the first group of witnesses, who are joining us by video conference.

For the benefit of the witnesses, who may not be familiar with all the procedures we have in place in the House of Commons to avoid acoustic shocks, I will outline the steps to follow.

If you do not have the floor, please turn off your microphone. When you do have the floor, please make sure your microphone is at about nose level.

We will now begin.

For the first panel of witnesses, we welcome first Mr. Yanick Baillargeon, who is president of Alliance forêt boréale. Then we have Bastien Deschênes and Karl Gauthier from Granulco. Finally, we are pleased to welcome two representatives of the Essipit Innu First Nation Council, Chief Martin Dufour and Mr. Michael Ross, who is director of development and territory.

Each organization will have five minutes to make their opening remarks.

We'll begin with Mr. Yanick Baillargeon.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon (President, Alliance forêt boréale): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I'd like to thank the committee for welcoming us today.

Kwe, Chief Dufour. Good morning, committee members. My name is Yanick Baillargeon and I am a warden. I'm appearing today as president of Alliance forêt boréale, a political organization made up of elected municipal officials from the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, La Haute-Côte-Nord and Manicouagan RCMs. Our territory is made up of 65 municipalities, 34 of which depend on the forestry sector. For these municipalities, forests are an important source of economic development, employment and vitality. Without the forestry sector, the future of these municipalities would be severely compromised, as it is our territory's largest employer. In fact, it creates over 20,000 direct, indirect and induced jobs, and generates over a billion dollars in wages.

Our organization advocates sustainable development and, in that respect, I would like to point out that we are requesting that measures to protect the woodland caribou be determined in consultation with local stakeholders in order to find win-win solutions.

In his July 16, 2024 impact analysis, Quebec's chief forester estimated the allowable cut for all species combined at nearly 800,000 cubic metres of wood for the Pipmuacan provisional zone, and at 357,000 cubic metres for Charlevoix. Several guaranteed-access licensees carry out forestry operations in these areas. In addition to timber harvesting, many forestry contractors carry out silvicultural work. The entire forestry sector is linked and interwoven like a chain. As soon as one link is cut, the chain breaks. If the decree is applied as it stands, more than 1.1 million cubic metres will be subtracted from our territory's allowable cut. Such a reduction jeopardizes not only the future of our forest communities, but also that of our entire region.

In that sense, Alliance forêt boréale is highly concerned about the socio-economic consequences that would transpire were the decree proposed by the Government of Canada to be applied. It is estimated that 100,000 cubic metres of wood create 325 direct, indirect and induced jobs, and that each cubic metre of wood harvested generates \$200 in tax benefits. Based on the results of Quebec's chief forester, job losses in the Pipmuacan region alone are estimated at nearly 2,500, which would be catastrophic. In the Charlevoix region, an additional 1,160 workers will lose their jobs.

We wonder how the Government of Canada can justify such consequences for workers, families and forest communities in Quebec.

Environment and Climate Change Canada considers only the cubic metres of wood that will be lost for each mill. Yet the decree will also have an indirect impact on forestry contractors and subcontractors, as well as induced impacts on businesses and other services in our communities. That is to say nothing of the social upheaval that could result from job losses.

Once again, we wonder how the Government of Canada can make the decision to implement such a decree without considering the indirect, induced and, above all, social impacts on forest communities.

The Government of Canada must consider that, in the Pipmuacan provisional zone, there are over 700 cottagers, three controlled harvesting zones, six outfitters, thousands of kilometres of multi-use roads, tens of kilometres of off-road vehicle trails as well as 11 trapping camps. So we're talking about significant economic and social activity.

How can the government claim to be able to achieve a disturbance rate of 35% by maintaining these uses and occupations in the sector, but prohibiting forestry activities there, when the sector is currently more than 80% disturbed?

Alliance forêt boréale also found that the Government of Canada had reached an agreement with Saskatchewan to allow a 60% disturbance rate in the northern part of the woodland caribou range. The essential condition for signing such an agreement is to demonstrate scientifically that this rate of disturbance does not jeopardize the survival of the species and its future. In other words, if this

agreement has been signed, it is because it has been demonstrated that the species could survive with a disturbance rate of 60%.

Why not set a disturbance rate for Quebec that takes the territory's forest productivity into account, as is the case for Saskatchewan?

We believe that imposing protection measures by emergency decree is unacceptable given that Quebec is working on a comprehensive protection vision. We demand a balance between protecting the species and preserving forest communities. Our organization believes that it is possible to reconcile forest management and caribou protection through rigorous management that respects biodiversity, and that, as such, the Quebec government has all the jurisdiction and credibility to achieve this.

Alliance forêt boréale urges the federal government to refrain from adopting this decree, which would have disastrous social and economic consequences, to refrain from interfering in the Quebec government's areas of jurisdiction, and to respect the processes currently underway.

Alliance forêt boréale is convinced that the imposition of this emergency decree will have catastrophic consequences on the economy and workers of our forest communities. More than 3,600 families will be directly affected by this measure that the Canadian government wishes to implement. How can it not take into consideration the social and economic consequences—not to mention the human suffering—that will result from the application of this decree?

Is the Government of Canada prepared to throw 3,600 families out on the street, including 2,500 in the Haute-Côte-Nord MRC territory alone, kill our territory's regional economy and create ghost villages that live off the government?

Thank you.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baillargeon.

We will now move on to Mr. Deschênes, from Granulco.

Mr. Deschênes, you have five minutes.

Mr. Bastien Deschênes (President, Granulco Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, committee members, as representatives of the Granulco company, we wish to express our deep concerns regarding the Liberal government's desire to adopt an emergency decree for the protection of the woodland caribou. This initiative, launched last June, has raised grave concerns among our workers and fellow citizens. Such a decree would have irreversible consequences for our community.

Founded in 2009, Granulco is a company integrated into the Boisaco group. Like all companies affiliated to the Boisaco Group, Granulco is organized according to a unique collective and co-operative model in which workers share ownership of the group. We're talking about nearly 1,400 workers and citizens, mostly from the region.

Granulco was born out of Boisaco's desire to diversify its activities and add value to residual materials from sawmilling to create new products. Its shareholders are the Essipit Innu First Nation Council; two investment companies, Intrafor and Investra, which bring together the citizens of our community; two workers' co-operatives, COFOR and UNISACO; and a management company, the Boisaco group.

Our company is located in the Sacré-Coeur industrial complex, where the Boisaco, Ripco and Sacopan plants are located. We specialize in the manufacture and marketing of energy-efficient wood pellets, which have been awarded many of the world's most demanding certifications. Our pellets are produced mainly from by-products generated by the various companies in the Boisaco group, which have internationally recognized forestry certification.

Our company generates 30 direct jobs associated with plant operations and various transportation activities. We're talking about 30 full-time, well-paid jobs that support 30 families and, in turn, a hundred or so local residents.

Granulco supplies certified bagged pellets for the residential heating market, mainly in Quebec, as well as equestrian bedding for the U.S. market. We are also very proud to have recently developed the bulk pellet market for export. Our bulk pellets are used to replace coal in power plants in the French West Indies. In this way, Granulco contributes directly to the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions.

It is important to emphasize that Granulco is contractually committed to delivering specific volumes over several years. In that context, Granulco had to carry out a modernization project worth over \$18.5 million, which was completed in December 2023. Thanks to this project, the Boisaco Group's industrial complex in Sacré-Coeur is now able to use all by-products from the Boisaco sawmill. That includes chips, sawdust, shavings and bark. This complex, the only one of its kind in Quebec, makes it possible to add value to the entire resource made available to the group to satisfy its Canadian and international customers.

The end of Boisaco's activities invariably implies the end of Granulco's activities, as it would be impossible, and I do mean impossible, to find other sources of supply nearby to replace the volume lost.

It's important to understand that, should Mr. Guilbeault's decree come to pass, it wouldn't just be Boisaco that would suffer the consequences, but all the companies in the industrial complex supplied with raw material by Boisaco's sawmill, which includes Granulco. The adoption of this decree would wipe out all the efforts made to build this company and the jobs it provides.

The government has a duty, and I do mean a duty, as well as a responsibility to consider all the facts and issues in this matter. It is inconceivable that we would sacrifice our workers, our families, including my own, and our communities. We all depend on the forest to earn a decent living and support our families, and have done so for many generations.

In conclusion, you must understand that no financial compensation can replace maintaining the socio-economic vitality of an al-

ready devitalized region like the one we live in, the Haute-Côte-Nord.

We would like to thank you for giving us the privilege of presenting you with a portrait of our reality.

Thank you very much.

• (1110)

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

Chief Martin Dufour now has the floor.

• (1115)

Chief Martin Dufour (Chief, Council of the Innu First Nation of Essipit): [*The witness spoke in Innu.*]

[*French*]

I'm Chief of the Innu First Nation of Essipit. I will loosely outline the ancestral territory of the Innu of Essipit, the Nitassinan, which stretches from the Portneuf River to the Saguenay, reaches as far as the municipality of Saint-Fulgence and borders Lac Poulin-De Courval.

Since 2003, a moratorium on boreal caribou hunting has been in effect on our community's ancestral territory. In 2000, we took steps to create a biodiversity reserve to be known as Akumunan, which means "the haven". In 2020, 20 years later, we witnessed the creation of this reserve, of which we are co-managers. Our community has also been in comprehensive territorial negotiations for 45 years with both levels of government.

I will now present further facts.

In 2016, Quebec published its action plan for the management of boreal caribou habitat, which was to lead to a strategy. In 2019, this selfsame government announced the start of indigenous consultations for 2021, promising the publication of a strategy in 2022. Two years later, the strategy is still pending, as are the indigenous consultations, forcing us to turn to the courts. I should point out that, to obtain the same rights we acquired through negotiation, other nations decided to take the legal route. It's been a long, drawn-out battle. On June 21, the Quebec Superior Court ruled in our favour. As a result, Quebec has until September 30 to consult us on the matter.

Let us turn to the federal decree.

Currently, 3.7% of the territory covered by the decree is on our ancestral territory, the Nitassinan. That's very little. We're often asked why Essipit supported the decree. It's not hard to understand: As I just told you, we've been waiting eight years for a caribou strategy, so the goal was to get the Quebec government to respond. That was the primary goal.

Among all the measures I've just listed or explained, none were taken with the aim of going against the industry. I'd like to make that clear. As Mr. Deschênes said earlier, we are co-owners of the Granulco plant, as is Boisaco. We also own the BMR hardware store in Les Escoumins. If no one produces the materials, we won't be able to sell them. I want to assure you that we're not anti-industry, not at all. Essipit's intention has always been to strike a balance between protecting our territory, jobs and development. It's a pity, because that's a message we wanted to drive home in recent weeks, but it was never relayed by the media.

Finally, and this is very important, I respectfully invite the Quebec government to participate with us and the federal government in the search for solutions to not only save the caribou, but also preserve jobs. I am convinced that together, we can find solutions that are acceptable to all.

Tshinashkumitin to all of you. Thank you for listening.

The Chair: It is we who thank you, Chief Dufour.

Mr. Martel will begin the first round of questions.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for agreeing to come and share their views today.

I have a question for Mr. Baillargeon.

We're hearing from some groups that the effect of the decree on forestry opportunities is only 4% and that the forestry sector is complaining for nothing. What do you think?

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: We strongly disagree with that assertion. Yes, the decree affects 4% of forestry potential across Quebec, but that represents 7.7% for Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and 12.3% for Côte-Nord. This is completely disproportionate to the impact that will be felt throughout Quebec. The impact will be much greater in areas such as the Haute-Côte-Nord and Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. In the Haute-Côte-Nord region, for example, Boisaco will lose around 60% of its allowable cut over the next few years, if the decree is imposed.

• (1120)

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Baillargeon, given the forest fires and the measures that have already been taken to protect the boreal caribou, times are tough right now.

Do you think the affected mills could source from neighbouring territories?

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: It's a bit utopian to believe that will be an option, because it will have an impact in a number of ways. First, there's transportation. We need to make sure that our access to this fibre is as close as possible to the mills, not only for economic reasons, but also for environmental ones. Secondly, distributing losses here and there, between just about every mill, would only weaken their productivity and competitiveness. So it's virtually impossible to engineer that kind of thing, i.e., to distribute the impacts between each of the other mills.

Mr. Richard Martel: We also heard that the forestry sector could do more with less wood by reinventing itself in tertiary processing. That comes up frequently.

Is it really possible to do that if there's less primary processing?

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: It would be extremely difficult to have secondary and tertiary processing, improvement and innovation without access to primary processing. Since it's a hugely important link across the entire chain, that's virtually impossible.

However, certain things could be implemented on the silviculture and forest productivity side to provide us with access to more wood, but over a smaller area.

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Baillargeon, you're also a warden. I'd like to hear your views in that capacity. Do you think the forest regions have done enough to diversify their economies? What are the results?

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: As I was explaining, the forest region we represent has 65 municipalities, 34 of which are forest single industries or directly dependent on this sector. And let's not forget all the recreational and tourism activities that are generated in these regions. Access to these activities will be blocked. If there is no longer a forest industry, it will be extremely difficult to access the territory and offer recreational tourism activities.

We also have to think about access to leisure activities. There are many vacation leases. Some city dwellers have what we call forest cottages, but those will no longer be accessible, since most of the time the roads are maintained by the forest industry. The RCMs won't have the power or the means to maintain the roads and ensure their continued safety.

That is also important for the protection of our forest. It's essential that we have access to the forest itself and that these roads continue to be built and maintained by the forest industry.

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you.

Mr. Deschênes, you said earlier that the government had a duty and a responsibility to take everything into account. I was interested by what you said, which leads me to my next question.

In your view, has everything been taken into consideration, at this point in time?

Mr. Bastien Deschênes: Unfortunately not, and in fact that's what we've been saying for several weeks, if not months. Since the decree was announced in June, we feel that a great deal of emphasis has been placed on protecting the caribou, and we agree with that, of course, but the socio-economic aspect has been somewhat neglected in all of this, unfortunately.

It's interesting to see that, since this committee began studying the issue on Monday, we've started to feel a balance between the various aspects of sustainable development. Society, the economy and the environment are all part of sustainable development, and it all has to be balanced.

I'll come back to what Martin Dufour told us earlier: I think people in Quebec and Canada are bright enough to sit down around a table and find concrete, intelligent solutions to protect both jobs and the caribou. Those results won't be achieved by applying a decree like the one that was announced. That's just not possible. We have to change course and start over again.

We hear all sorts of things about the Quebec government. People say it hasn't done anything for several years, but that's not true. It has implemented plans and done a great deal. I think it's simply that the information isn't found in quite the same place.

• (1125)

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you.

I don't think I have much time left, do I, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left. That's enough for one last comment.

Mr. Richard Martel: I won't be able to do much with that.

Thank you.

The Chair: I understand, then, that we will now move on to Ms. Fortier.

Welcome to the committee, Ms. Fortier. You have six minutes.

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you very much for welcoming me to the committee today.

I found the witnesses' opening remarks most interesting. I thank them.

Mr. Baillargeon, obviously, I know you're an advocate of the economy, as I think we all are. That said, do you see the urgency of protecting the caribou and the environment?

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: In fact, we don't necessarily advocate the economy. At Alliance forêt boréale, we're firmly focused on the sustainable development of this sector. So, all angles are respected.

As for the caribou, there was often talk of a decline. However, the documents published by the Quebec government would have to include successive inventories, over a period of three to five years at most, to conclude that there truly is a decline. The Quebec government website doesn't currently provide all that data. The data are too far apart in time and have not been collected on the same territories successively. The reference inventories go back to 2020. I rather think that we'll be able to assess the situation in the future.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Do you find it reasonable that the Quebec government still has no plan for the caribou in your region, when they are in decline there, according to the figures we see in Quebec and Canada?

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: It is indeed inconceivable that the Quebec government would not sit down with the federal government to resolve that situation.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Deschênes, I'd like to ask you the same question, since you probably have an opinion on this too.

Do you think the Quebec government should have a plan?

Mr. Bastien Deschênes: What I'm arguing right now is that the Quebec government does have a plan. Action has been taken since

2005. There are areas to which we don't currently have access because of the presence of boreal caribou.

It seems that the federal and provincial governments haven't really spoken to each other. They haven't taken the time to sit down and talk about what's been done since 2005, what's going well, what's not going so well and what still needs to be done. Opportunities for dialogue have been missed.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I have a question for Chief Dufour.

I heard you talk about balance in your presentation and I have the same approach. It's important to protect caribou, biodiversity and jobs at the same time.

Could you explain a little more about how we could ensure this balance and keep the forest healthy so that we can use it to generate economic opportunities in the forestry sector?

Chief Martin Dufour: The Essipit Nitassinan is one of the areas most affected by logging in Quebec. Logging began in the 1800s. In some places, this is the third or fourth time logging has been done. So there's a lot of work to be done to restore a habitat that will allow the reintroduction of a large caribou herd. We do have caribou. On our Nitassinan, there are about three mature forest massifs left.

If we want to find solutions, Quebec absolutely must be involved, because it owns important data. To get a true picture of the territory, we also need the federal government on board, as well as the industry and, of course, first nations. I'm hammering home the same message: It's absolutely essential that the Quebec government participate in the process, and I respectfully invite it to do so.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

Mr. Baillargeon, I'd like to give you the chance to continue your presentation. You had other solutions to propose to ensure the protection of caribou while ensuring the economic vitality of the region. I now invite you to continue.

• (1130)

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: In fact, the solution lies with everyone. The governments of Canada and Quebec, the communities, the forest industry and the indigenous communities have to sit down together to find solutions, instead of fighting each other. That's the way ahead. There's room for everyone. We believe in it, we know we can protect the species and the economy, but if no one is sitting at the same table, it will be impossible. That's the message we need to convey this morning.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Fortier.

We'll move on to the Bloc Québécois. If I'm not mistaken, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe will ask the first questions.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses who are here today, in the context of this important study.

Mr. Baillargeon, you said that this emergency decree will have an unprecedented catastrophic impact on forest communities in your territory.

We've heard a lot about the example of the municipality of Sacré-Coeur. In fact, the mayor came to testify here at the committee.

Could you give us other examples of forest communities, other than Sacré-Coeur, that will be affected by Mr. Guilbeault's decree?

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: In fact, just about every sector of the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, La Haute-Côte-Nord and Manicouagan RCMs will be affected by this decree.

As we explained at the outset, you can't remove one link in the chain and expect the whole thing to keep working. This will have repercussions for all our communities. I mentioned that our territory is made up of 65 municipalities, 34 of which are virtually single industry and forestry. As soon as one of them falls, there will be a second, then a third. There will be a domino effect. It's going to collapse.

We mustn't forget one thing: 74% of the boreal caribou's range is above the northern limit. There's no logging in that area. We're talking about 74% of its range. However, the caribou is said to be in decline. Is it really the forestry industry itself that's putting it at risk? I think that's the question that should be asked.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Baillargeon, I'd like you to explain to people what's going on in the forest industry, because they're not necessarily aware of it.

You talked about links. Not everyone knows, for example, that chips or wood residues from one sawmill will be used by another wood industry. Could you explain this to the committee?

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: I'll give you a very simple example. Twenty-five per cent of the chips used by the Clermont paper mill come directly from the Boisaco sawmill. If Boisaco is shut down, the Clermont mill won't have access to 25% of the Clermont mill's chip supply. That will certainly have repercussions, and these will be felt throughout the industry, and so on.

We talk about bioeconomy and tertiary processing. I no longer have access to that. If we lose mills, it affects the supply of by-products to another factory. That's what I mean when I talk about links in the chain. You have to understand that a mill is not alone in its environment. Many others are linked to it, and many communities are interrelated.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Baillargeon.

I'll yield the rest of my time to Mr. Simard.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Thank you for joining us today, Mr. Baillargeon.

You've clearly demonstrated what we call the domino effect on the forestry sector. When we remove one link in the chain, the whole chain is affected.

I'd also like to hear your comments on what we might call the "cumulative effect".

Yesterday, there was a great demonstration in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. The thorny issue of the caribou was highlighted, but there was also the issue of tariffs. The forestry sector is experiencing a highly unfavourable economic climate, and I'm sure you can give us more information on this.

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: In fact, several situations involve the Quebec government and the federal government. We're all familiar with the U.S. softwood lumber surtax that's currently in effect. We're close to 15%. That money is currently frozen at customs, and manufacturers have no access to it. That prevents them from evolving, reinvesting in their mills and, above all, innovating. Then there's the price of fibre, which is influenced by Quebec's forestry regime. It's always said that the cost of harvesting fibre from the forest is too high, and that the market for wood is not good. What's more, there's the threat of a decree on caribou. Right now, we're gasping for air. Our heads are under water and we can't catch our breath. There's a noose around our neck.

Pick any example you like to describe the situation, right now we're being choked from all sides.

• (1135)

Mr. Mario Simard: Earlier, you highlighted the specific case of Saskatchewan, whose disruption rate is 60%. To your knowledge, is there scientific data to prove that a disturbance rate below 35% is needed in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean to save the caribou?

In your opinion, before applying the order, shouldn't we try to obtain other types of scientific data and, perhaps above all, try to conduct a crossover study between what was done in Saskatchewan and what's happening at home in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and on the north shore?

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: We've been asking the federal government for that over the past few years. We had already approached Minister Guilbeault about this. We didn't get an answer. We were really trying to see how we could apply this measure to Quebec, because clearly we could do that in certain sectors. We need to make sure the species survives, and that's what Saskatchewan has done. The sectors that are said to be able to ensure the survival of the species may have a higher disturbance rate, and some sectors will have a disturbance rate below 35%. Of course, that can be done, but they never studied a measure like that, they never introduced it and they never even responded to the request.

Mr. Mario Simard: I will give the final word to my colleague.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

Mr. Baillargeon, some people tell us that if forestry communities see their facilities close down, they will be able to easily reinvent themselves. I come from a forestry region and I was a forestry worker. I worked at the Alma paper mill.

Do you think that kind of comment is realistic?

The Chair: Please give a very brief answer.

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: I'll be very quick. I can give you the example of Val-Jalbert, which everyone knows about. Its mill has shut down and it's now a ghost town.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boulerice, you will wrap up this first round of questions. The floor is yours.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank everyone for being here today for this important study.

I think we all have the same concern, which is to preserve good jobs and the vitality of the regions, save towns and avoid closures. This is a central concern. At the same time, the threat to the woodland caribou subspecies is real. It's been documented for a long time and promises were made to deliver strategies.

I think we all need to feel a sense of urgency about the caribou, who are not at the table to express what they're experiencing and how they're feeling. I liked what Chief Dufour said about striking a balance between this sense of urgency for the species and the need to be concerned about economic development and saving jobs. I'd like to ask him a question about that.

I've recently read what a lot of biologists have to say, and they feel that the caribou species are an indicator of how healthy a forest is and how balanced its ecosystem is.

How would the potential loss of boreal caribou affect the health of our forests?

Chief Martin Dufour: We've already discussed that and I've heard from scientists about it. A study on the health of our boreal forest may be in order, because the caribou aren't its sole inhabitants. Other species migrate and live in mature forests. I'd really like to know more about the health of our boreal forest and not just the caribou's health. Scientists have requested that. I'm sorry, I don't recall who it was, but something tangible is needed, a study or a consultation between various departments so that we know how much wood we will have and how far we can go to retain jobs.

Our motto is "For Our Fathers and Children". Everything we do at Essipit is focused on making sure our seniors have a good quality of life and passing that on to our children. I want my child to be able to work in the forestry sector one day, but also go and hunt caribou. Ideally, that's what I'd like to see. Is that going to be possible? It's not up to me.

We really need to know where we're headed, as I said earlier. Let's take off the blinders and try to look further ahead. I'm sure we have people smart enough to do that in Canada, Quebec and our first nations.

• (1140)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I agree with you, Chief Dufour. However, just to educate us a little more, can you tell us what the difference is for caribou between a mature forest and a young forest or one that's just been reforested? How does that affect the species?

Chief Martin Dufour: I'll ask Mr. Ross to answer that question. He's a biologist with us and the director of development and territory.

Mr. Michael Ross (Director of Development and Territory, Council of the Innu First Nation of Essipit): Thank you, Chief Dufour.

Yes, the first message I'd like to convey today is that we've heard a lot from first nations and industry, but not from scientists. Leading scientists in Quebec could certainly tell you even more about it than I can, even though I'm a biologist.

Basically, forest rejuvenation and clearing the land bring in caribou predators, including wolves and bears. That has an impact on the caribou's survival, because it makes them more vulnerable. When the land is cleared and the forest rejuvenates, that draws moose and predators. Wolves see no difference between a caribou and a moose, at the end of the day.

That's the biological answer I can give you, but scientists could shed more light on this.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Ross.

Chief Martin Dufour: I have something else to add.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Go ahead.

Chief Martin Dufour: I know that your committee is studying these issues, but I think Mr. Ross raises an important point: Few scientists have come and testified before the committee. I don't know which witnesses have been invited to testify. I haven't checked to see all the witnesses appearing before the committee, but it would have been a good idea to invite renowned scientists, who are neutral, both for the industry and to strike a balance in all this. They could have testified before the committee.

I just wanted to say that.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Chief Dufour, you're also a business owner. You're involved with companies in the forest industry. You're appearing before the committee with people you know well, both those participating online and those here in the room. You co-own the same company, but you come to completely different conclusions. For someone on the outside, like me, that's a bit disturbing.

Chief Martin Dufour: We've always said that we've never been against economic development. We're taking part in it and will continue to do so. We say that we want to promote a balance between protecting our territory and economic development. We protect the environment.

The Chair: We understand what you're saying. You're looking for a middle ground. We understand that.

We'll start the second round of questions with Mr. Deltell.

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

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to your parliamentary committee on the radical Liberal order about the woodland caribou.

Chief Dufour, you're joining us online from your nation's territory. In fact, I can see on the screen that you're in the office and that the flag of the Innu First Nation of Essipit's flag is right behind you.

I don't want to assume anything, but am I to understand that the caribou is on your nation's flag?

Chief Martin Dufour: Our animal emblem is the moose, Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Okay. I could see the image on the flag behind you.

You raised the issue of scientists, and earlier, Mr. Ross talked about predators.

At the beginning of the week, here in committee, witnesses came to remind us what happened in British Columbia about 15 years ago, when the situation was more or less the same. People got permission to hunt caribou predators. In that case, it was wolves. We asked people about that, including the chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador, Ghislain Picard, whom you know very well. He said he was open to this proposal.

As Mr. Boulerice said earlier, as an Innu, you play a role in the ecosystem and the economic system of the situation you're currently experiencing. Do you think the idea to permit hunting of predators, like wolves, for example, could have a meaningful impact? In British Columbia's case, it's important to note that herd numbers have gone up more than 52% in less than two years.

What do you think of that?

• (1145)

Chief Martin Dufour: We did two expeditions last year to hunt wolves. Several trappers on traplines in Nitassinan capture this animal.

We've been trying to reduce the wolf population for years.

Mr. Michael Ross: Chief Dufour, if I may, I'd like to make a comment.

Basically, reducing the wolf population is a short-term solution. There's no doubt that if we don't restore their habitat, unfortunately, if we don't keep doing that, the caribou will continue to decline. It is a solution, granted, but it's a short-term one that must be coupled with habitat restoration.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: This proves that there is no silver bullet, that each solution brings its own challenge and that there are also potential solutions.

For the people of your nation, this situation, as you experience it in your territory, can be promising. You can draw inspiration from the situation in British Columbia about 15 years ago, which saw

herd numbers shoot up. That might be an avenue to explore further. I wanted to make more of a comment, but that sums up what you said.

Mr. Deschênes, from Granulco, you said earlier that what you're currently doing is good for the environment because, in fact, wood pellets are a solution to replace coal, which is too often used in Europe, among other places.

Can you tell us more about how your industry, which occupies the territory developing raw materials, can be very good for the environment?

Mr. Bastien Deschênes: That's a very good comment, Mr. Deltell. You're absolutely right.

As a result of the thinking we did when we wanted to invest—we did so to the tune of \$18.5 million—we turned to bulk pellets, but we still carefully studied everything going on in Europe. Europe has been going green for a number of years. We wanted to do our part as well. We targeted that type of customer, so we're actually helping to replace coal with pellets. It's a long-term contract, and we're having a good effect on the environment. By investing that kind of money, we wanted to show that we're going green. We wanted our investment to do some good.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: If, by some misfortune, this government adopts the radical Liberal order, it will have a negative impact on the environment.

Mr. Bastien Deschênes: You're absolutely right.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Do your European partners or customers talk to you about that?

Obviously, you're involved in innovation and sales, which creates the pure wealth we all need in Canada, particularly in the regions.

Are your customers starting to talk to you about this? Are you seeing a direct impact on your orders?

The Chair: Please provide a fairly brief answer.

Mr. Bastien Deschênes: Yes, our customers do talk about it. Our customers are openly advocating for this green shift on their websites. They're trying to find people around fibre suppliers to meet the extremely high certification requirements as part of this shift, as I said in my presentation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Chatel, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): I'll turn it over to my colleague Peter Schiefke.

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mrs. Chatel.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Chief Dufour, you stated the following:

[English]

Our communities have chosen to suspend caribou harvesting in order to preserve the species, sacrificing a traditional activity that is central to our culture.

[Translation]

Can you tell us how important this activity is to your community and how you got here?

Chief Martin Dufour: Yes. We've also reached this point, by the way, with salmon, which we've also stopped harvesting.

When there was a significant decline in the population of the species on our territory, it was easy for us to say that we had to stop the hunt, because continuing it would have gone against our principles. Fortunately, an agreement between the Innu nation as a whole and the Cree allows us to go to Cree territory to hunt animals and maintain a certain connection, which we had lost in Essipit. It has to be said: With everything that happened, the caribou moved, and as a result, our nation had all but lost the connection. That agreement helped us get it back. Thank you to our Cree brothers for allowing us to do that. These hunts are community-based and all Innu nations are entitled to a certain number of caribou. Last year, we had to reduce the number of caribou we hunted because of the forest fires that took place there. However, with this agreement, over time we can reconnect with the iconic meaning this animal had for our community. It must be said that the caribou have not completely left our Nitassinan, but there are very few of them. On our Nitassinan, we've never really hunted caribou.

• (1150)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you, Chief Dufour.

Mr. Ross, as a biologist, can you speak to the link between the health of the caribou population and that of our forests? Can we have one without the other?

Mr. Michael Ross: That's a good question.

The answer is that caribou is an umbrella species. We're talking a lot about caribou today, but for us, protecting caribou also involves protecting other species. There are other endangered species on the Nitassinan. There are the Bicknell's thrush and the Barrow's goldeneye, for example. These species are linked to the same type of forest as the caribou. That doesn't include other species whose status we don't yet know.

So the forest lands that remain in our area, which Chief Dufour was talking about, are very important to biodiversity on our Nitassinan.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: When we invest to protect the caribou population, we're investing to protect our forests and the forest industry. Is that right?

Mr. Michael Ross: From a cultural standpoint, it certainly helps protect biodiversity on our territory.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you, Mr. Ross.

Biologist Pier-Olivier Boudreault, conservation director for Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Quebec, is on the next panel of witnesses we will hear from. In an interview, he said that the

province of Quebec had delayed tabling its strategy four times since 2018. He also said:

The federal government issued a number of warnings and granted another extension last year because of the forest fires. We think the federal government has been patient enough.

Chief Dufour, do you agree with Pier-Olivier Boudreault?

Chief Martin Dufour: We've been actively working for eight years. The Quebec government was supposed to come up with a caribou strategy, but they put it off. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seemed to me that Minister Guilbeault had reached an agreement last year to give Quebec one more year. I thought there was an agreement between Quebec and the federal government. I didn't think it was about forest fires, but it may be.

Quebec has to be there. The Department of the Environment has developed significant expertise. We need to strike a balance between the environment and forestry work. Both departments should be at the table.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Dufour.

Mr. Simard, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chief Dufour, in your opening remarks, you mentioned that consultations should be held on a nation-to-nation basis or between Quebec and the Canadian government as well as the first nations. Who knows, some businesses could be part of that. I bring it up because I know that the caribou issue is hard to resolve.

How can we find a compromise between protecting the species and the interests of the forest industry? There is no silver bullet. However, I think it would be wise to stop drafting the order for now and leave room for joint action by first nations, the Government of Quebec, industry and the Government of Canada. Do you agree?

Before we close, I would like to ask Mr. Baillargeon the same question. Would he agree to some form of consultation before the order is drawn up? That might help us find potential solutions.

• (1155)

Chief Martin Dufour: What I understand is that the current legislation dictates that the federal government has no choice but to act. Could an order include consultation? I believe so. I believe we could include it before taking concrete action.

Mr. Mario Simard: The Court of Quebec has ruled in your favour, asking the government—

Chief Martin Dufour: We've been negotiating a modern treaty for 45 years. We've always focused on negotiation. However, other nations have used the courts. As I said earlier, we also used the courts, because we had no choice but to protect what we had. It took 45 years to obtain certain gains. We had to do it that way, but we've always been in favour of negotiation on any issue.

Mr. Mario Simard: Before I go to Mr. Baillargeon—

The Chair: Unfortunately, you're out of time, Mr. Simard. Mr. Baillargeon will certainly be able to tell us more in response to questions from other members.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Ross.

There are challenges with predators, such as wolves, and roads that make it easier to get to caribou. Earlier, you talked about the need to restore habitat.

In your opinion, what are the potential solutions to restore habitat, to ensure better protection and the survival of the boreal caribou? What are we talking about?

Mr. Michael Ross: Again, it would be good to have caribou experts answer those questions. That said, from what I know, in 2016, the community closed roads that didn't lead to any cottages or anything. They were side roads with nothing at the end of them.

That's certainly the first thing. We also have to think about forest management in a way that minimizes impact on the species. People can do things differently for the future, and certainly find ways to restore the way things were in the past by closing the roads, which is one option.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much.

Chief Dufour, you said in your opening remarks that the order applied to only 3.7% of your territory. I was a little surprised by that.

Do you think that's too little? Would you like to see more?

Chief Martin Dufour: That's the reality. The order was conceived that way.

Quite simply, the rest of the order affects the neighbouring community of Pessamit. I urge you to try to contact its members. I know there was an election in the community, but I think they could try to answer your questions on their territory.

That said, we're talking about 3.7%. That means our Nistassinan is very much affected and the caribou habitat is very limited. There are some, but not enough to maintain a large herd. That's what it means.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

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

Mr. Baillargeon, you made a very compelling case for preserving the economy and the caribou. There's no one better to convince others than a man who is himself convinced.

You're at the centre of this association of people who want to protect both caribou and the economy. In your experience, what should be the first steps taken as a potential solution to strike and maintain this balance that everyone wants between economic development and caribou conservation?

• (1200)

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: There has to be a concerted effort from all stakeholders in the field. When I say all stakeholders, I mean indigenous communities, industry, the municipal realm, and the provincial and federal levels. Everyone needs to be at the same ta-

ble. It's the only way to save the species. We mustn't forget that Quebec has had a caribou plan in place since 2005.

Volumes have already been withdrawn from forestry opportunities, precisely to protect this species. So it's totally wrong to say that nothing is being done.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: If we want good co-operation, we have to start with the reality of the facts and with the measures that have already been taken. Among others, I'm referring to those of the Government of Quebec, which you just mentioned.

Earlier, we talked about the issue of predators and the example of what was done about 15 years ago in British Columbia. For two years, they allowed predator hunting. In this case, it's the wolf. That made the herd more than double in size.

Do you see that as an avenue that could be pursued? As Chief Dufour so aptly demonstrated earlier, his community is already doing this. Could it be done more?

Mr. Yanick Baillargeon: That's obviously one avenue that can be used. However, I think we also have to look at the impacts of climate change. It hasn't come up nearly enough in everything that's being said at the moment. The impact of climate change on the species is not being accounted for in what's being said here. It's not just the forest industry; climate change also has an impact and, yes, there are predators, such as bears, among others.

We must put a complete set of measures in place, and that's why we will need to do it together, not each in our corner.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Deschênes, I'd like to come back to you. Your company has a real impact, because you are truly involved in the green economy. You're giving a new lease on life to what was thrown out and burned in another era. You've turned it into a resource.

That has a green impact because your European customers are leaving coal behind and using the raw material you produce. Are there other similar actions that could be taken in your industry, but also in the forest industry where it's targeted by the order, that could show many people that what happens in the forest is good for the environment?

Mr. Bastien Deschênes: You're absolutely right: What we do in the forest is good for the environment. There have been a lot of negative messages in recent years because people were constantly hammering away at the forest industry. We harvest in the forest, like we do in a garden. The practices are heavily regulated.

Every year, we're monitored through internal audits before we're granted our environmental certifications, among other things. Boisaco certainly has a sustainable development policy. We want to go green and take concrete action, both in Quebec and abroad.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

In closing, I'd simply like to say that we're all trying to strike a balance between economic development and environmental protection. In this case, we can do it. We've been doing it for a number of years and we must continue to do it. We can balance saving the animals—in this case, the caribou—and saving our jobs and our economies.

We've heard people's heartfelt pleas, we're aware of current realities and we've heard potential solutions. That's why we're doing it. We have to look at what's currently being done in a positive way rather than hampering and diminishing what's being done in the forest. On the contrary, let's be proud of our forestry workers.

The Chair: Thank you.

To conclude, I will now turn over the floor to Ms. Fortier.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Deschênes, I'm pleased to ask you more questions.

I find the discussion really interesting, and solutions have been provided. I find it refreshing to see that the Conservatives want to take action to reduce carbon pollution. It's nice to know that we agree that the economy and the environment have to work well so that the regions can continue to prosper.

Mr. Deschênes, can you tell us how your company operates? You said that you're putting measures in place to ensure that you protect the environment and the caribou. Have you done any studies on that? Is a team suggesting that you adopt a particular approach or develop services?

I would like you to tell us a bit about that.

• (1205)

Mr. Bastien Deschênes: Those are very good questions.

European certifications are very stringent. We turn to our fibre suppliers, who must show that their product is balanced with sustainable development, including protection. We have SFI certifications. Boisaco is audited every year, in an extremely broad manner, by people from abroad who come to see exactly what we do. We give them access to our books. We go into the forest to check what's really happening on the ground, to ensure that there is protection and that development is sustainable.

Granulco's responsibility is to ensure that all of our fibre suppliers have a perfect environmental footprint and that they meet European standards, which are very strict when it comes to protection.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I imagine that, following an audit, you must meet the recommendations and apply new or adapted measures.

Can you give us some examples of what's happened in your company in the last five or ten years?

Mr. Bastien Deschênes: Often, in the case of audits, there are minor non-compliances and major non-compliances. We rarely get an empty page, because the audit is very broad. There are a lot of regulations and we have to do a number of validations.

As for concrete examples, I will let my colleague, Mr. Gauthier, talk to you about them. We're not experts; we're generalists. How-

ever, we have teams of experts. I would have had to bring a certification person with me to give you concrete examples.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Ultimately, what you're telling me is that your company is following concrete measures. As a result of the audit, recommendations are made to you. You're organized and, within your company, you have experts and probably scientists who can apply these measures, so that you can meet the standards you've told us about.

Mr. Bastien Deschênes: You're right, Ms. Fortier.

We do a lot of work with outside firms specializing in the specific areas you mentioned. They guide us throughout the year, as do our employees who work on certification.

It's a team effort, but it's important to work with experts in the field.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Do you work with other companies in your sector? Do you work together? You suggested that we all need to work together. Do you already have some alliances that make it possible for you to help each other in the current situation?

Mr. Bastien Deschênes: Yes, because all the pellet producers in Quebec are grouped under the Quebec Wood Export Bureau, or QWEB. We sit at the same table, we discuss our realities, our certifications and our challenges. In Quebec, there are associations that allow us to collaborate very openly.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you for that. It shows us that there are other key players that need to be part of the solution.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Then thank you again, and thanks to all the witnesses for sharing their knowledge and experiences with us.

The Chair: I too would like to thank the witnesses and the members of the committee for their excellent questions.

We will take a short break to welcome the second panel of witnesses.

I would like to thank the witnesses once again for being with us this morning.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1215)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

We have four new witnesses.

From the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, we have Alain Branchaud, director general of the Quebec section. Nature Québec is represented by Alice-Anne Simard. From Litière Royal Inc., we have Eric Fortin, president. From Scieries Lac-Saint-Jean Inc., we have Caroline Lavoie, forest engineer.

Without further ado, we will move on to the first presentation.

Mr. Branchaud, you have five minutes.

Mr. Alain Branchaud (Executive Director, Quebec, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to extend my greetings to all members of the standing committee, as well as to the other witnesses.

My name is Alain Branchaud and I am a biologist and director general of the Quebec branch of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, or CPAWS Quebec. I also worked for about 10 years on Environment Canada's species at risk program, specifically on critical habitat protection.

Our organization's primary mission is protecting public land and biodiversity, including species at risk such as caribou.

In 2023, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change recommended to the Governor in Council that an order be issued under section 61 of the Species at Risk Act to protect all parts of the critical habitat of the boreal caribou population located in Quebec and Ontario. The Governor in Council turned down the minister's recommendation. We thought that was a good decision on the part of the Governor in Council. The political and economic repercussions of such an order would have been more detrimental to the protection of caribou and, ultimately, to the Species at Risk Act.

In 2024, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada raised the issue again and recommended to the Governor in Council that an emergency order be issued under section 80 of the Species at Risk Act to protect three caribou populations in Quebec. This time, the Governor in Council responded positively to the minister's recommendation. Again, we think this is a good decision by the Governor in Council.

The emergency order proposed by the Canadian government is justified and measured. First and foremost, it's scientifically justified. For the three targeted populations, the rate of habitat disturbance is critical. Demographic trends indicate a significant decline in recent years, and activities recognized as threats to the survival and recovery of the species continue to be carried out on the ground.

The order is also justified from a biocultural perspective. Caribou are a species of great cultural and spiritual importance to many indigenous communities. Restoring them is essential to maintaining the culture, way of life and traditional practices of these communities.

What's more, the order is legally justified. Before intervening outside federal lands, the federal government must ensure that it acts in conjunction with other federal and provincial legislation in force in areas where a province or territory is not adequately fulfilling its fiduciary role to protect the species. To issue an emergency

order, it must ensure that there is an imminent threat to the survival or recovery of the species. All three conditions are met in this case.

Lastly, the scope of the order is measured, covering only three of 15 caribou populations in Quebec, as well as a small proportion of the designated critical habitat. The anticipated socio-economic impact is certainly significant at the local level, but limited in the Quebec forestry sector as a whole. Solutions exist to ensure a fair transition and support for the communities that will be affected.

What is important to note is that the partial caribou protection strategy introduced by Quebec on April 30 has a lot of potential and, with major adjustments, could contribute significantly to the recovery of the species in Quebec. Unfortunately, Quebec has still not presented a clear timeline for its implementation. Given the urgent need to act for the three populations targeted by the order, it is fully justified and necessary for the federal government to adopt this emergency order. When Quebec's caribou protection strategy was tabled, CPAWS once again called on the federal minister to intervene quickly to protect populations on the brink of collapse, particularly those in Pipmuakan.

In order to facilitate a fair transition for the communities affected by the order, we recommend that the Canadian government show its hand and fast-track negotiations for a nature agreement with Quebec, as it did for Nova Scotia, Yukon and British Columbia. This potential agreement would quickly put all the stakeholders in solution mode.

The boreal caribou population is found in a number of other areas in Canada. The federal intervention does not necessarily mean that Quebec is falling short compared to other provinces or territories. Based on the reports published under section 63 of the Species at Risk Act, the federal government has all the information it needs to justify targeted interventions elsewhere in Canada where other caribou populations are on the brink of collapse.

CPAWS Quebec will soon be submitting a brief to support the adoption of the emergency measure as part of the consultations and will be making targeted recommendations to improve its scope.

Thank you for your attention.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Branchaud.

Mrs. Simard, you have the floor.

Mrs. Alice-Anne Simard (Nature Québec): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, committee members.

Thank you for inviting Nature Québec to speak today.

Nature Québec is a non-profit environmental organization that has been focusing on the conservation of natural environments and the sustainable use of resources since 1981. Our team of 30 professionals is supported by a network of volunteer scientists. Since 2019, I have been the executive director of the organization, which brings together 145,000 members and supporters. I'm a biologist with a master's degree in caribou biology.

Nature Québec supports the emergency order being considered by this committee, given the lack of action by the Government of Quebec to adequately protect the habitat of the caribou herds. These herds are on the verge of extinction following the indefinite postponement of the comprehensive strategy to protect the caribou that has been promised since 2016. There are growing concerns that indigenous nations risk losing their identity, culture, traditional activities and ancestral rights if the caribou disappear. In our view, the federal government has not only the legitimacy to issue such an order, but also a legal and moral obligation to do so. Quebec played a dangerous game and opened the door wide to this order.

At Nature Québec, we make sure that each of our positions and recommendations is based on science. When it comes to caribou, the science could not be any clearer. There is a scientific consensus on the fact that the boreal caribou herds are declining, and there is a scientific consensus on the causes of that decline. They are primarily logging and the network of logging roads that cause habitat disturbance and increased predation. These facts were corroborated in 2021 in a literature review produced by biologists employed by the Quebec government's Ministry of Forests, Wildlife and Parks.

We wanted to remind you of the scientific consensus right off the bat, because we have unfortunately heard witnesses at this committee question that consensus and make totally false statements about the state of the caribou herds and the causes of their decline. Like the chief of the Essipit Innu Nation, we are concerned that no scientists who have studied caribou have been heard by this committee. If the committee wants to know if the herds are really declining and if it is true that logging has an effect on the caribou, you should ask scientists, not forestry industry representatives.

Naturally, we at Nature Québec understand the concerns of the forestry industry and, above all, the communities that depend economically on the forest. We are in particular solidarity with the residents of Sacré-Coeur, who are feeling a lot of anxiety right now. We want to make it clear, however, that this is not a choice between losing the caribou and losing Sacré-Coeur, or even the entire forestry industry in Quebec, as some witnesses have suggested. That is a false dichotomy. We believe that the Government of Quebec is doing everything in its power right now to maintain this false dichotomy and worry the public by burying the solutions.

Solutions to limit the socio-economic impact of the order exist, and the Government of Quebec has known about them for a long time. In 2016, the Government of Quebec presented its action plan for the management of the boreal caribou habitat. In a summary document, or placemat, which we can forward to you afterwards, the Government of Quebec announced that it would analyze the socio-economic consequences of its action plan. The placemat is where the government announced for the first time that it was going to adopt a caribou protection strategy, which we have been waiting on for eight years. Most importantly, it was here that the Govern-

ment of Quebec announced that it would conduct a systematic review of other timber supply sources when consequences on forestry potential were unavoidable. I quote from the document:

All alternatives will be assessed systematically, with a view to mitigating supply reductions for the affected mills: timber production strategy, sustainable yield concept, appropriate delimitation of management units (MUs), use of timber from the private forests, timber shipments, use of unharvested volumes (2008-2013) to mitigate the impacts, and so on.

Not only did Quebec neglect to conduct the analyses, it is now burying the solutions. The first step in limiting the socio-economic impact of the order is to conduct a procurement analysis for each mill. The Department of Natural Resources and Forestry is currently burying this information. Measures could subsequently be put in place to offset that impact. The Government of Quebec knows what they are, and it alone can implement them. By not putting forward these solutions, by releasing exaggerated figures on potential job losses, by using a crude rule of thumb to estimate the consequences, the Government of Quebec is fanning the debate, encouraging disinformation and creating unnecessary stress for workers and communities that depend on the forest. We understand that some members of the committee want to protect provincial jurisdictions, but we must not blindly protect Quebec's incompetence and lack of leadership on the issue of caribou and sustainable forest management.

Thank you.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Simard.

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor.

Mr. Eric Fortin (Chief Executive Officer, Royal Wood Shavings Inc.): Good morning, everyone.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Eric Fortin, and I am the president of Royal Wood Shavings Inc., a company we founded in 1996. The company's mission is to manufacture and distribute animal bedding in North America. On an annual basis, we supply over 12,000 horses. Over the years, we have sold over 50 million bags of bedding to a variety of prestigious customers, including the RCMP. We have three plants, two of them located in the United States. A third, Ripco, has been established since 2001 in Sacré-Coeur, on the north shore, in partnership with the Boisaco group.

Ripco is a secondary processing plant that recovers the wood shavings from the Boisaco planer. These shavings were not previously recycled. Ninety-five per cent of our material comes from the Boisaco plant, and 45% of our production is for export.

Over the years, we have invested several million dollars, including more than \$2 million in the past three years, to ensure that the plant is on the cutting edge of technology. We are part of the economic ecosystem of the north shore timber industry as a subsidiary of Boisaco.

However, the federal government's recent decision to impose an emergency order regarding caribou has led to palpable anxiety among our workers and created a climate of fear. The uncertainty caused by the order is stifling our projects and investments. From what I understand, the federal government is proposing to protect about one million hectares in the Pimpuacan area, which is the equivalent of 20 times the Island of Montreal.

Boisaco's annual harvest currently takes place on about 4,000 hectares, or 0.4% of that area. Tearing apart an entire community by depriving it of its territory in order to protect the boreal caribou ecotype is an extreme solution. If Boisaco were to shut down due to a wood supply shortage, that would signal the death knell for Ripco as well. Royal would also be severely impacted. The consequences would be devastating, not only in terms of job losses, but also for the affected families who depend on these jobs for their survival.

The social and economic impact on businesses and workers' lives of imposing such an order absolutely need to be considered. The idea that lost jobs and business will easily be replaced is far-fetched, considering that an ecosystem like the Boisaco group on the north shore was built up over four decades by people from the region. The north shore has very little industrial diversity. I can't picture Jean, our longtime press operator, retraining as a seasonal tour guide in the few years he has left before retirement.

I listened to a few excerpts from Monday's committee, and the vast majority of stakeholders of all political stripes favour co-operation. However, the words I heard about "imposing an order" do not exactly signal "co-operation". I find it hard to understand the urgency of imposing such an order, after consultations conducted in the summer, to resolve an issue that has been ongoing for decades.

Whatever the intent or objective, this course of action does harm to people and businesses and stokes tensions in the community. Both levels of government have a duty to bring all stakeholders together to find a solution that will preserve jobs while protecting the boreal ecotype of the woodland caribou.

Keep in mind that the companies working in the wood processing sector have always expressed a desire to find concerted and adapted solutions to protect the boreal caribou in a spirit of sustainable development, which also helps the forestry communities flourish.

Is it not more constructive to work in that spirit than to risk a legal battle between two levels of government?

For society to prosper, our governments need to co-operate with entrepreneurs rather than pick fights with them. Let's not forget that the businesses affected by this order play a crucial role in wealth creation, innovation and job creation, and in doing so contribute to the overall well-being of our community.

We all know that the consequences of eliminating jobs, and the resulting hardship and poverty, are extremely harmful to human beings. A study published in *Psychiatry Research* in 2012 indicates that an unemployed person is 16 times more likely to commit suicide.

If, let's say, 2,000 jobs are lost, there will be a likelihood of five suicides. Never mind the social and economic repercussions of the psychological distress caused by job losses. Far be it from us to say that the condition of the boreal caribou doesn't matter, but is it acceptable to intentionally sacrifice jobs and destroy families, communities and businesses?

I think about the human beings in my companies, for example, our deputy director, Marc-André, who provides for his five young children. All of these people are dependent on their jobs. As a society, we rightly want to preserve biodiversity, but people's well-being must remain a key priority for our governments.

Dialogue and co-operation are essential to building a society where community development and environmental protection go hand in hand.

I hope that my voice and the voices of all constituents will be heard in your deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.

● (1230)

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

Ms. Lavoie, you now have the floor.

Ms. Caroline Lavoie (Forestry engineer, Scieries Lac-Saint-Jean Inc.): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, I would like to thank the committee for allowing us to speak about the federal emergency order for the protection of boreal caribou.

My name is Caroline Lavoie, and I'm a forest engineer. Today, I am speaking on behalf of Scierie Martel, as well as Scieries Lac-Saint-Jean and Groupe Lignarex, both members of the Coopérative forestière Ferland-Boilleau.

Our businesses are all unique in that they have been established in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean by local families or groups of workers. These pioneers have been busy developing not only their businesses, but also their communities. They have revitalized their communities, making it possible for hundreds of families to settle and live in the regions. As the saying goes, you have to know where you came from in order to know where you're going. I will try to make sure that we do not forget where we came from.

The forestry industry has helped build a strong, thriving Quebec. It also provides considerable revenue to the government so that it can develop and maintain its social programs. The forestry industry is far from archaic. We've been able to adapt, modernize, optimize resource usage and become a major player in achieving Canada's net-zero objective.

The forestry sector also markets wood products that are among the most environmentally friendly in the world and will eventually make it possible to eliminate single-use plastics and avoid the use of substitute products with a larger carbon footprint. Besides all that, these products come from areas certified under internationally recognized sustainable forest management standards.

The forestry industry is a prime example of sustainable development. We're harvesting trees from forests that have already been harvested once, and sometimes twice. We're talking about green aluminum and green steel. How could anyone forget that nothing is greener than the forest?

Mr. Gilbert, Mr. St-Gelais and Mr. Verreault have told you about the provisional order areas of Pipmuacan and Val-d'Or. I will focus on the provisional order area of Charlevoix, because it affects a lot of the territory where we have traditionally operated. Keep in mind that the Charlevoix herd disappeared in 1920, and 82 individuals were reintroduced in the early 1970s. In February 2022, the 21 individuals who made up the herd at the time were captured and penned. Today, the herd is made up of 31 animals. The provisional order area covered by the Charlevoix herd covers nearly 3,000 square kilometres, plus adjacent protected areas of 1,608 square kilometres, for a total of 4,608 square kilometres. That is the equivalent of 12 times the Island of Montreal. Might I remind you that there are now 31 individuals, which would correspond to a density of approximately 0.8 caribou in all of Montreal.

We are not refuting the need to protect caribou in Quebec, far from it. Since 2003, the provincial government, in partnership with industry, first nations, and other stakeholders, has made efforts to ensure their recovery. I myself have participated in all the processes that the government has proposed to us as we work with the first nations to develop a planning strategy for the protection of the caribou habitat that maintains the sustainable development balance.

Section 80 of the Species at Risk Act allows for an emergency order to be issued if the minister believes there are imminent threats to the species. We feel that the Charlevoix herd does not meet the criteria for imposing such a decree. There are two reasons for that: first, equivalent or even superior measures are currently proposed in the pilot project tabled on April 30 by Quebec City; second, the penning of the herd's 31 individuals immediately removes them from any imminent threat. For these reasons, we believe it would be legitimate for the federal government to amend its order to completely remove the provisional area within the Charlevoix boreal caribou range.

Implementing the order in its entirety would remove nearly 17% of our companies' supply territory, which would irrevocably result in permanent closures and estimated losses of nearly 1,500 jobs, including mine.

I will conclude my remarks by making two requests of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. I ask you to remember where we come from and to consider the true value of the forestry industry so that it can continue its immeasurable contribution to the three pillars of sustainable development in Quebec. I would also ask you to trust the provincial government, which has jurisdiction over wildlife and forest management, to de-

velop appropriate strategies to protect both the boreal caribou and the forestry industry.

Thank you.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lavoie.

Once again, we will start with Mr. Martel.

Mr. Martel.

Mr. Richard Martel: Again, I thank the witnesses speaking here today.

My first question is for Mr. Branchaud.

As you know, when speaking about the adverse economic repercussions of the order, Mr. Pier-Olivier Boudreault, director of conservation at the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, or CPAWS, said that you cannot make an omelette without breaking a few eggs.

I have a question. Why do we need to protect land in a wildlife reserve in the Laurentians when the caribou are already safe in their enclosure?

Mr. Alain Branchaud: Restoring an endangered species involves more than just protecting individuals. We have to make projections to ensure that a population becomes self-sufficient. The purpose of recovering an endangered species is not to create zoos everywhere, with species in enclosures or aquariums, but to have a natural environment where populations can reproduce and be self-sufficient. We are currently relying heavily on enclosures to ensure the survival of this population. We will see what happens. However, to protect a species like the caribou, we absolutely must protect its habitat. The science is very clear on this and there is no scientific doubt about the need to bring in measures to address the activities that are harmful to the caribou. Current practices used by the forestry industry are the main cause of the decline in the caribou populations across Canada, not just in Quebec.

I invite people to look to the future. If we protect what we need to protect now to achieve everyone's goal, to protect the caribou, we will create predictability and be able to determine how to practise forestry without harming the caribou's habitat—

• (1240)

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Branchaud, sorry to interrupt you. I appreciate what you are saying, but I would also like to talk to Ms. Lavoie.

Ms. Lavoie, we often talk about the habitat of the boreal caribou, but I often hear that the caribou end up in freshly cut forests to find food. I would not go so far as to use the word contradiction, but what are your thoughts on this?

Ms. Caroline Lavoie: The caribou are opportunists. If they see an opportunity to nourish themselves more easily in younger stands, they will move in. I am not a scientist, a caribou expert, but caribou are going to use the land that is available to them. Is that land ideal? I cannot say, but they are going to use what is available.

Mr. Richard Martel: Ms. Lavoie, if we look at the current acreage being considered by the provincial government, what percentage of your land supply would be affected?

Ms. Caroline Lavoie: As I said in my speech, with the order, we are talking about 17%. The current provincial scenarios, both in Pipmuacan and the Charlevoix area, still cut 20% of our land supply. Roughly 5% of these areas are common. A third of our land supply is affected and that does not count the call for protected area projects under way, following which other land could be removed from developable land.

Mr. Richard Martel: Ms. Lavoie, what are the adverse effects of reducing forestry availability to humans? You experienced that during the plant closure in 2008.

Ms. Caroline Lavoie: Yes. I was working at Louisiana-Pacific when the plant closed in 2008. I experienced the end of production. When the plant closed, I watched everyone leave with their lunchbox, not knowing what would happen the next day. Among the workers were spouses who both worked at the plant. The entire family was affected. We saw people leaving the region, divorces; we saw human stress. I can tell you that the stress runs deep in our communities. It is not a fear campaign. These are the facts. If the order is applied, there will be closures. Human tragedy will be inevitable.

Mr. Richard Martel: You speak with passion. We can feel it. You speak with pride. I would like you to use that same pride to tell us about the forestry sector's business model in our region.

Ms. Caroline Lavoie: In Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, the forestry sector binds the region. Many municipalities are single-industry towns. The forestry industry represents 37.4% of the entire manufacturing sector in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. If it goes away, the entire region will be devitalized. That does not mean that every industry will shut down. However, because of the way the system is set up right now, because our volumes are regional, a drop in forestry potential will affect everyone in the region. If the entire industry is weakened, that will be a disaster for the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region.

What is more, there has been little talk of the paper mills. As I said, the forestry industry has modernized and optimized its operations. Trees are 100%—

The Chair: Thank you. Unfortunately, I must interrupt in order to give the floor to Ms. Taylor-Roy.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Mr. Chair, I think I will take the floor.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Chatel, you have the floor.

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

Welcome to all our witnesses.

Today's discussions are very interesting, but so were last week's. I think some consensus is emerging. I think that all the players, including those from the forestry, agree that there is no economy without the environment. The economy cannot be built out of thin air. It requires a solid environment.

The potential disappearance of the caribou is a sign of the decline of our forests. There does not seem to be any dissent on that.

In my riding, Pontiac, there are some good forestry industries. The industry has evolved and adopted sustainable practices both for production and export. Consumers are looking more and more for sustainable practices and the industry has adapted.

However, let's be clear; it is the governments' responsibility to protect the environment, not just for us, for today's jobs, but also for those of tomorrow. I heard Chief Dufour say that he would like his children to be able to continue working in the forestry sector. It is the governments' responsibility to set clear objectives. When we talk about the decline in caribou populations, we are talking about the decline in the forest and the forestry industry in the long term.

It is important to seek consensus from all the players on this. We have to work together. We need consensus to find solutions. We have publicly said that as soon as Quebec adopts appropriate measures and states its strategic plan for protecting the caribou's environment, for protecting our forests and our future, we will no longer need the order.

I would like to address Mr. Branchaud.

How long have you been asking the Government of Quebec to do more for the caribou?

• (1245)

Mr. Alain Branchaud: Since 2016, when the draft document came out, when the idea was born to have a caribou protection strategy, CPAWS Quebec participated in every commission, every meeting possible to collaborate with the Government of Quebec. We are also working with the industry, including Chantiers Chibougamau, to introduce alternative approaches to protect the caribou and keep jobs. We are a good-faith player. For three years now we have been asking the federal government to intervene in a very targeted way to protect the populations that are on the brink because of what I would describe as procrastination by the Government of Quebec. It is not that the Government of Quebec is doing nothing, but as of today, August 30, 2024, there are still no measures in place. We are still in consultations and the Government of Quebec has not presented a clear timeline.

As I said in my speech, Quebec's proposals have great potential, but these measures are still being pushed back. We are in a situation where someone has to be serious and responsible and take action to protect the caribou habitat. These habitats are being targeted first because it is the scientific way of ensuring the recovery and survival of the species.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you very much.

Ms. Lavoie, do you agree that the forestry industry needs certainty? There needs to be a plan. We need to know where we are going and that everyone is on board. We are partners in all this.

Ms. Caroline Lavoie: I fully agree with that, Mrs. Chatel.

Mr. Branchaud told us that his organization took part in several processes in good faith. The forestry industry is of the same view. We invested as soon as we were asked to, with regional operational groups and the independent commission on the caribou. We raised our hands and took part. We have always been there.

We are all on the same wavelength. We are calling for real collaboration. We do not want a strategy to be developed if all we can do is make comments. We want to develop the strategy with our partners, the environmental groups, the first nations, the department, and with the federal government. This needs to meet their criteria so that there is no other order. We must build this strategy together.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I fully agree with you.

Mrs. Simard, do you think there are any solutions? We obviously want to protect the economy, but we also want to ensure an economy for our young people. They too have the right to work in the forestry sector. We want to protect our biodiversity and the caribou. If the caribou and the environment collapse... We live in the same environment that they do and if there is a decline in the species, we could be next on the list. We are all concerned.

What are the solutions for protecting the jobs of today and tomorrow, for protecting the environment and for protecting the economy? Do you think there are any solutions, Mrs. Simard?

• (1250)

Mrs. Alice-Anne Simard: Yes, of course.

Let me talk about the Charlevoix area specifically.

We are all on the same page when it comes to the concerns raised by Ms. Lavoie and her team. In the case of Charlevoix, the federal order proposes an entirely different territory than what is being proposed by the Government of Quebec's pilot project. At Nature Québec, we recommend bringing in the Government of Quebec's pilot project. Its scenario is quite similar to the one that was studied by the Commission indépendante sur les caribous forestiers et montagnards—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Simard.

Sorry to interrupt you.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: You can send a response in writing, Mrs. Simard.

The Chair: Indeed, sending comments in writing is always possible.

I apologize for cutting you off, but I had no choice.

Mr. Simard, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Lavoie, some witnesses have talked about the order's domino effect on the entire forestry network, as well as the cumulative effect. When we remove forest potential, it becomes harder for all the players in the industry—we are all aware of the auction system in Quebec. In your testimony you indicated that the application of the order in Charlevoix's case would lead to the loss of one third of your cutover area.

I would like you to talk about the consequences this could have on planning.

Ms. Caroline Lavoie: I want to clarify that this third also includes the Pipmuacan sector, which is partially part of our supply area.

As for the consequences, there is no doubt that we will not be able to maintain our activities with a loss of a third of the area. As Mrs. Simard just said, the current federal order is completely different from the scenario that was proposed by the provincial government. During the implementation of the interim measures taken by the provincial government when a moratorium was imposed on the area, in 2019, we lost 3,000 hectares in our planning. The order would remove another 3,000 hectares, even 3,800 hectares, back home.

As you know, the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region has been affected by the spruce budworm epidemic. That is another challenge our industry is facing. We can harvest only 50% of our supply of what is referred to as green wood. The order applies to every sector of green wood. To us, that is the equivalent of four years of planned, harmonized and department-approved harvest that is being taken away. That is a lot. We always talk about predictability for the forestry industry and its partners; we are losing predictability for ensuring our industry's supply for the next five years.

Mr. Mario Simard: I do not want to put words in your mouth, but if I understand correctly, executing the order would be an added threat to other threats the forestry sector is facing, such as the spruce budworm infestation and the tariffs. There is already insecurity in the sector. Add to that the lack of predictability in the availability of the fibre for the next four years.

In that context, are there still forestry companies that are willing to invest in their facilities?

Ms. Caroline Lavoie: For now, everyone has obviously taken a step back.

We were just acquired by the Coopérative forestière Ferland-Boilleau, who truly has strategic visions and is envisaging interesting synergies. However, as far as orders for new equipment at the sawmills, such as kilns or planers, are concerned, everything has slowed down because no one knows what to expect in the future.

Earlier there was talk of alternatives, either wood from private forests, wood from auctions and unharvested wood. In the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region, these things are already taken into account. Extreme efforts are already being made to try to supply the plants, but our supply pledges, our volumes in private forests and our volumes at the auction house do not even meet our plant needs. The pressure is even greater on auctioned wood. For companies like the one I represent, in other words SMEs, that means we have to fight on markets with much larger sawmills. We are still having a hard time coming out ahead. That puts us at high risk, makes us very vulnerable. Bankers being bankers, they are not going to lend money to vulnerable companies.

• (1255)

Mr. Mario Simard: Thank you.

Do you know how many individuals there are in the herd in Charlevoix?

Ms. Caroline Lavoie: Currently 31 individuals are being temporarily enclosed.

Mr. Mario Simard: Okay.

Mr. Branchaud, I am not sure if you have any information on how many individuals are needed for maintaining a herd.

Mr. Alain Branchaud: That depends on different populations, the dynamics of the populations and an ecosystem's support capacity.

In the case of the Charlevoix population, I do not remember what recovery target was set, but the number of individuals that we should be able to reach is around 200 at least to have a population that has a higher chance of survival, to prevent consanguinity problems and things like that. Protecting the habitat absolutely addresses this sort of situation.

I think that answers the question.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left, Mr. Simard.

Mr. Mario Simard: Okay.

I think the number 200 is interesting. I do not know what it is based on, but I suppose that the scientific data can clarify the number of individuals that should be in place to maintain a herd. If you could table documents on the matter to the committee, we would be grateful.

Mr. Alain Branchaud: It would be my pleasure. Again, there are nuances to take into account.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Again, I thank the witnesses for coming here to share their expertise and knowledge with the committee as part of this very important study.

Mrs. Simard, earlier Mr. Branchaud talked about procrastination and the Government of Quebec. You talked about inaction, even incompetence, on a species that, in your view, is on the brink of extinction.

What do you think are the repercussions of continuing to wait and to put things off?

Mrs. Alice-Anne Simard: Goals will simply not be met. The legal obligation to protect threatened species, species at risk, will not be fulfilled. Both the Government of Quebec and the federal government have this legal obligation, and they have an opportunity...

I would like to elaborate on what I was saying earlier. For Charlevoix specifically, it is possible to find solutions and prevent repercussions from snowballing on companies like the one Ms. Lavoie represents. For example, they could adopt the scenario proposed by Quebec, which is built on a consensus in the region

and was recommended by the Commission indépendante sur les caribous forestiers et montagnards.

In that particular case, all the repercussions that are causing anxiety for Ms. Lavoie's company could be vastly mitigated. It is just a matter of turning to these solutions. Obviously, all the researchers working collectively are telling us that we need to act quickly. If not, we are going to completely miss the goals. The Government of Quebec has had more than enough time to act.

In August 2022, it signed a joint press release with the Government of Canada in which it said it had the will to move toward protecting all the herds in Quebec. In the meantime, no action has been taken since that announcement.

It is time for action.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I am pleased to hear that. In the NDP, we are truly concerned with protecting jobs, but also with the energy transition. That transition has to be fair to the workers, who need to have a place at the table during discussions. Charlie Angus, my NDP colleague from northern Ontario, worked on this sustainable jobs legislation.

What you are saying, Mrs. Simard, is that we do not need to reinvent the wheel. The independent commission has already done some of the work, and the different levels of government and the different stakeholders should build on that document and use it for coming up with measures to be taken.

• (1300)

Mrs. Alice-Anne Simard: Exactly.

Many players, many witnesses have talked about the need for co-operation and consultation. All of that work has already been done. An independent, expert-led commission toured Quebec for nearly a year and analyzed a great deal of documentation. It met with scientists, it met with industry, first nations communities, and so on. It made recommendations and presented a lengthy report that provides a bit of an action plan.

When the report came out, we at Nature Québec said that was the strategy that the Government of Quebec should use. The commission, which was given a mandate, presented a perfect strategy that needs to be implemented. We have the document. We know what to do. It is a matter of taking action.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mrs. Simard.

Mr. Branchaud, over the past few weeks, there has been a lot of talk about thresholds for the boreal caribou. So that everyone understands, I would like you to tell the committee what exactly these disturbance thresholds mean.

Mr. Alain Branchaud: In preparation of developing a recovery program, the federal government ordered a study in 2011. It met with leading caribou experts to determine the connection between the threshold or the disturbance rate and the chance of survival for a caribou population. The conclusion the scientists came to was that if the disturbance rate is 35%, the herd's chance of survival is 60%, which is not high.

The mathematical model indicates that as the disturbance threshold increases, the herd's chance of survival plummets. The more the disturbance rate drops below 35%, the higher the chance of survival. The mathematical model was built by scientists, taking into account all the data generated about the caribou population across Canada and it contributed to this conclusion.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Branchaud, I would like you to talk about the disturbance for the boreal caribou species. Mr. Ross, who was part of the previous group of witnesses, told us that to restore the species' habitat, we also need to consider measures for the roads that disturb the caribou because they are also highways for the predators.

Do you agree with him on that?

Mr. Alain Branchaud: Absolutely.

If we take the Charlevoix example, the disturbance rate is around 90%. In the proposed measures, including by the Government of Quebec, there is talk of restoration. Quebec even announced a rather large envelope to do this work, in the event that a caribou strategy is adopted. Yes, the habitat needs to be restored and preserved.

I would like to share an important message. Earlier today I heard a lot of people denying science. This is reminiscent of the reaction in the tobacco industry or the reaction to climate change. This has to change.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Leslie, you have five minutes.

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

[Translation]

I am sorry, but, since my French is still not good enough, I will speak in English.

[English]

I'd like to echo some of the concerns we've heard here regarding a lack of science. I'll start with the failure of the minister and officials to appear before this committee to explain the entirety of the logic behind this job-killing decree they have issued. When witnesses come here from industry and say they will have to go out of business or curtail their employment, I believe them. I don't think the government should be so arrogant to say that we don't believe them and to put our entire communities at risk.

Now, as this is the environment committee, I'd like to dive into some of the actual evidence of how this decree would work.

Ms. Simard, I think you have the closest appropriate background, so I'll begin with you regarding the caribou science. Hopefully, you can give a fairly quick answer. What would be the timeline for a forest to go from disturbed to undisturbed? Let's say we blocked off all forestry and all activity. How long would it be in years? It has to be years. As far as I know, trees don't grow fast enough for it to be anything less than years.

When would it be considered undisturbed so that we could have the decree lifted or a plan put in place?

[Translation]

Mrs. Alice-Anne Simard: In fact, that is not the right question. The order takes into account sectors that are currently not disturbed. The most favourable habitat for the caribou is primarily old-growth forests. These habitats are already the least disturbed possible.

The mathematical model was used by officials at Environment and Climate Change Canada. Adjustments need to be made to this model, obviously, and that is why consultations are under way. However, the fact is that the most favourable sectors for the caribou are forests that are old and as little disturbed as possible. They are the ones we need to preserve.

● (1305)

[English]

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you. I think it's reasonable to have those consultations.

Again, this is the environment committee, so I looked at the science. One of the most robust reports I could find was from Ecological Applications in the United States, which cites that Serrouya et al., in a 2019 study, "synthesized the results of several recovery actions applied to southern mountain caribou." Although it's the same species, it is a different ecotype. Our B.C. and Alberta examples are ones that we can look to for the remediation efforts that have been undertaken. The report notes, "They concluded that wolf reductions and combinations of multiple measures, such as wolf reductions and maternal penning, were effective at increasing caribou population growth."

I took note of the Saulteau First Nations in B.C., part of an indigenous-led effort that has been guarding maternity pens with rifles and removing predators as they come about. That has increased the population there from 36 to 135 as of 2022.

We have emergency decrees. We have emergency meetings that we don't know will be going towards the consultation of this. Everything is an emergency, so it seems to me that we should act with the urgency that reflects results happening imminently. The evidence seems to show that in totality, penning and predator reduction are the most imminent ways to increase the caribou population.

Now, there are long-term implications. There could be increases in coyotes and beavers. Wolves could figure out how to change their behaviour to avoid the reduction or culling of these animals, so it might not be the long-term solution. You would have to do it in perpetuity. However, rather than just destroy communities, destroy forestry industries and destroy livelihoods, would it not make sense to take action that is imminent, that makes sense immediately, that will halt the reduction, that has been proven to halt the reduction in caribou populations and that will in fact increase it? It's a measure we can work on with the appropriate government of authority over wildlife and natural resources, which is the provincial government. We can work with industry and find the old-growth forests that make sense to be maintained and make sense to be protected. Would that not be a reasonable approach that solves a lot of the problems of this innate emergency that we're facing?

I'll start with Ms. Simard, and then I'll open it up to other panelists.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alice-Anne Simard: Killing predators works, but it is an extreme measure. This sort of measure has been around in Quebec for many years. Measures like this have been taken for many troops. It is just like putting caribou in enclosures or in zoos. That is being done. It is an extreme measure. These two measures are not working because they are not enough. There also needs to be protection and habitat restoration.

I invite members of the committee to consult the dozens of scientific articles written by researchers from countless universities and research centres who are working on the caribou issue in Quebec. This is one of the most studied species in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Ms. Simard.

I'd like to quickly ask Mr. Fortin or Ms. Lavoie if they have any comments regarding that.

The Chair: I'm afraid your time is up, Mr. Leslie.

We'll go to Madam Fortier.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That is very interesting. I thank the witnesses again for sharing their experience, their knowledge and their opinions.

If I understand correctly, the imminent threat of the order applies not only to the caribou's survival, but also to its recovery. So, if I understand correctly, there needs to be adequate recovery plans that would help these caribou herds become self-sufficient. I hope the witnesses can confirm what I am thinking when I ask questions.

Ms. Lavoie, you mentioned that the regional plan proposed by Quebec would be adequate. However, from what I understand, this plan is still under review. Do you understand that Quebec needs to announce its final plan in order for the Canadian government to be able to determine that it is adequate?

Ms. Caroline Lavoie: The pilot project is at the consultation stage, just like the order. However, the pilot project still does not cover all of the factors that can influence the dynamics of the caribou

populations. We are not going against the scientific articles that have been written—there are many. However, we would say that the scientific articles on the caribou are always based only on the disturbance thresholds. The main culprit, the forestry industry, always takes the heat.

We are not burying our heads in the sand. We know that we have an influence on the habitat. However, we believe that it is not the only influence. There is species migration. When I was a kid, at the lake, there were no raccoons or deer. Now I have them in my yard and in my chicken coop. That is a factor. Biting insects that affect the caribou's energy levels are sticking around longer, which is another factor. I am not a scientist, but it seems that many factors are having an influence on the caribou populations and those factors are not being taken into account.

As for the glass dome principle, we fear that this will lead to a scenario where everyone loses. It is not going to help recovery efforts and the forestry sector will suffer disastrous consequences. We fear that we are going to pay a high price to ultimately not save the species.

That is why we are participating in the consultations on the pilot project. Not everything has been included for a strategy that covers all of the factors that influence the dynamic of the caribou populations.

• (1310)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

I would ask all the witnesses to answer in 30 seconds, which will use up my speaking time.

From what I understand, the Government of Quebec and the Government of Canada are coming to different conclusions. Why do Quebec and Canada seem to be coming to different conclusions when it comes to the land in need of protection?

I will start with Mrs. Simard.

Mrs. Alice-Anne Simard: In this case, it has to do with the Charlevoix herd, where two different sectors, one in the east and one in the west, are being studied. It's probably just a matter of mathematical analysis of preferential habitat versus the pilot project that came out of the independent caribou commission. Charlevoix is a perfect example of where collaboration between Quebec City and Ottawa is essential. This could go a long way to alleviating concerns for the industry.

There are other areas, however, such as in Pipmuaican and Val-d'Or, where Quebec has no projects in place. Obviously, the only measure currently being proposed is what is in the decree.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Branchaud, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Alain Branchaud: I would add that, in the case of the Charlevoix caribou population, the federal government has tried to act in the interest of co-operation. Some areas are not covered by the Quebec government's projects, including old-growth forests, which are interesting from the perspective of ensuring the recovery and survival of the caribou. Our vision for this aspect may differ slightly from that of Nature Québec, but there is some very solid science behind caribou recovery, and we really need to rely on it.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Fortin, what is your position on this?

Mr. Eric Fortin: We have never been directly involved because we do secondary processing. Boisaco has always managed this file with the governments. I'm not in a position to comment on the conclusions of one government compared to another.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Okay.

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Fortier.

Mr. Simard, go ahead.

Mr. Mario Simard: I'll be quick.

Ms. Lavoie, I'm going to ask you to answer my question in under a minute. I'm sorry to rush you, but I don't have much time.

To follow up on my colleague Ms. Fortier's question, are you aware of any potential solutions proposed by the industry to maintain the caribou population?

Ms. Caroline Lavoie: Yes, we have already proposed some at the independent commission hearings. However, our forest management needs to have manoeuvrability. Right now, the regime and all the other constraints mean that we no longer have manoeuvrability. We go where we can, not where we want to go. If we had more leeway in forest management, we'd be in a better position to amalgamate different types of management that would be better for the caribou. We'd be able to act more intensively in other areas. For that, we need manoeuvrability.

• (1315)

Mr. Mario Simard: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I would like to discuss a motion I intend to move. You may have noticed that things are moving quickly on the intersection between caribou protection and the impact on clean energy projects. You have the text of the motion in front of you.

Given that the Committee advocates a global and integrated approach, and that the protection of any endangered species is closely linked to the protection of the environment and the ability to put forward green strategies to replace fossil fuels with clean energy projects such as wind, biomass, and hydroelectricity.

That the Committee add an additional meeting to the present study to study the potential effects of an emergency decree on the deployment of clean energy projects and on the infrastructures required for the smooth operation of these networks, and that to this end, the Committee invite experts from these different clean energy sectors, such as Hydro-Québec.

I don't want to cut into my NDP colleague's speaking time, but I hope we can agree on this. Perhaps we could let my NDP colleague speak and then come back to the motion. This is a friendly suggestion.

The Chair: I believe you've tabled the motion.

Mr. Mario Simard: Yes, I have.

The Chair: That's where we're going. It's time to debate and vote on the motion.

Are you finished your intervention?

Mr. Mario Simard: I would add that, after seeing the media this morning, I understand that Mr. Guilbeault indicated that he had become aware of this problem and was in discussions with Hydro-Québec. However, I don't think that settles the issue, for the moment, of using biomass in energy projects. I'm open to discussion on that. I'm asking the committee for a lot of flexibility.

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: We're open to that discussion as well. That shows how flexible we are.

Of course, our goal is for the government to cancel its radical Liberal decree. However, we want to work here, on this committee, and if we're going to do that, we might as well work with relevant information. That's why we suggested people from Boralex and Hydro-Québec, green energy producers, on our list of witnesses. We wanted these individuals to be able to describe the impact of the Liberal decree concerning boreal caribou on green energy, which is exactly the objective of this motion.

However, rather than adding a day, we would be adding hours to the meetings already scheduled.

Mr. Chair, we would therefore like to add four elements to my colleague's motion. Therefore, we are tabling the following motion, which is largely based on what is being done—

The Chair: So you're amending Mr. Simard's motion.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: In fact, for the sake of fluidity, here is the motion including the amendments I have just briefly discussed. It reads as follows:

“Given that the Committee advocates a global and integrated approach, and that the protection of any endangered species is closely linked to the protection of the environment and the ability of the Quebec Government to put forward green strategies to replace fossil fuels with clean energy projects such as wind, biomass, and hydroelectricity, and that a mobilization of the forestry sector took place in Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean yesterday calling on the federal government to abandon the radical job-destroying decree. That the committee add an additional hour to the meetings already scheduled for the present study, in order to study the potential effects of an emergency decree on the deployment of clean energy projects and on the infrastructure required for the smooth operation of these networks, and that the Committee invite Boralex and Hydro-Québec; and, because the Minister of Environment violated the first motion that has already passed to appear in the 7 days requested by the committee, the Committee summon him to appear before this committee for no less than 2 hours, before September 16, 2024.”

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: There are two motions. In fact, we are really—

Mr. Mario Simard: I am willing to negotiate a few changes, but this proposal is not exactly in keeping with the spirit of the motion. Agreeing to add an hour is one thing. I know that there have been discussions between the minister and Hydro-Québec. Will this issue resolve itself? I hope so. I would be very happy if it did.

Mr. Chair, I propose that we add to our study an additional two-hour meeting on energy. My colleague, Mr. Deltell, could ask to invite representatives from Boralex, if he so desires. We could hear from people. There are all sorts of biomass projects. Recently, in the news, we saw that some indigenous communities have decided to move forward with this sort of project to reduce their carbon footprint. We could each submit witnesses.

I don't want to spend a lot of time on this, but I think that by talking about a "radical decree", we are getting into a debate that will put our government colleagues' backs up. What I want is for us to be able to examine this essential issue, which perhaps shows that we also need to calculate the cost and inconveniences of the decree, because the forestry industry plays an important role in helping us to meet our greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.

As we have been saying from the start, we need to find a balance between protecting the species and protecting jobs. I am saying that in good faith. Above all, the purpose of this motion is to say that the energy transition to clean energy is a critical part of the equation. I would therefore like us to agree right now to add an extra meeting. Then, we could propose witnesses later. That way, we could get back to hearing from the witnesses who are here and my NDP colleague could ask his last few questions.

• (1320)

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice and Mrs. Chatel have something to say.

I just want to clarify something first. We are examining Mr. Simard's motion to add an extra meeting, to examine the energy transition and to invite witnesses, including representatives from Hydro-Québec. That is the motion we are debating.

Meanwhile, Mr. Deltell submitted an alternative motion. This is just a piece of advice, but if we don't want to get bogged down in this matter, we need to keep things simple. We will hear from Mr. Boulerice and Mrs. Chatel. I don't want to influence the debate, but if Mr. Deltell just wants to make a few small amendments and add a few phrases to Mr. Simard's motion and if we all agree to add an extra meeting, then we could deal with this rather quickly. Otherwise, we will have to get into amendments and subamendments. If that is the case, then we will have to dismiss the witnesses because we don't have much time left. That is what I wanted to say.

Mr. Boulerice.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think that, since Mr. Simard moved his motion first, then we need to debate it and dispose of it first. On our end, we agree that we should take the time to consider the impact that this will have on the biomass industry and on Hydro-Québec's green energy projects. I think that those are relevant issues. I was not convinced at the start that we needed to add another whole meeting, but perhaps we do, if we are bringing in more witnesses.

Today, the NDP has heard a lot of people saying that we have not heard from enough scientists and that we are not paying enough attention to science. We would like to invite some biologists to hear what they have to say. We could find experts to come talk to us during that meeting. We could invite representatives from Boralex and Hydro-Québec, as well as scientists and biologists.

I would like to dispose of Mr. Simard's motion simply because it was moved first, but also because the references and language used in Mr. Deltell's motion are partisan and could cause controversy. It could give rise to a lot of debate.

The Chair: Mrs. Chatel.

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

I think this is important. These are important issues. I don't think it will do anyone any good to make this political, as the Conservatives are doing. I completely agree with—

The Chair: Mr. Martel on a point of order.

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Chair, could we dismiss the witnesses, who are waiting—

The Chair: I'm not ready to dismiss the witnesses, Mr. Martel.

We may be able to settle this issue rather quickly. I think that the witnesses want to have their say. If certain witnesses need to leave because they have a meeting or an appointment, then they can let me know, but for the time being, I want to focus on the motion.

Please continue, Mrs. Chatel.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I'm used to being interrupted by the Conservatives in this committee. I think that every time a woman speaks in this committee, she gets interrupted, but that's the way it goes.

Yes, I completely agree with the proposal to invite representatives from Hydro-Québec. I also agree that we should talk about biomass and the green energy industry. Like Mr. Boulerice, I would really like to hear from scientists and biologists in that regard.

• (1325)

The Chair: If I understand correctly, we can do all that, if we adopt Mr. Simard's motion.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Just a minute, Mr. Deltell. I will give you a chance to speak again after.

Mr. Simard.

Mr. Mario Simard: We could compromise. I heard what Mr. Boulerice was saying. We could set up a meeting and invite people from the energy sector in the first hour. I will not include any names in the motion.

As for the Hydro-Québec representatives, I don't know whether they will be satisfied with the discussions with the department. There are definitely biomass projects, and I'm sure the Boralex representatives will want to address the committee.

In the first hour, we could focus on the connection between clean energy and the decree, and during the second hour, we could invite experts, which I think would make Mr. Boulerice happy. If we agree on that, I am ready to vote right away so that we can get back to what we were doing.

The Chair: I would say that the motion makes all of that possible. We just need to set up the meeting.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, I would just like to remind the committee of what we proposed in the motion that I read earlier.

First, we proposed that “the Committee invite Boralex and Hydro-Québec”. That is what the Bloc member wants. I would like to remind the committee that the Conservatives were the only ones who included Boralex and Hydro-Québec on the witness list last week. Of course, we are in favour of what we are proposing. Second—

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, I am rising on a point of order.

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Deltell. There is a point of order.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Perhaps this committee does things differently, but in other committees, when a motion is being debated, the committee debates the motion that is currently tabled. Members do not try to debate a second motion. I am trying to understand—

The Chair: We are debating the motion. Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Second, we talked about the fact that “the Minister of Environment violated the first motion that has already passed to appear in the 7 days requested by the committee”. That is the truth.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Mr. Chair. I am rising on a point of order.

The Chair: I have to interrupt you, Mr. Deltell. There is a point of order.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Mr. Deltell already said all this earlier. He read his amendments.

Can we just confirm that we heard his rhetoric and get on with the meeting?

The Chair: What I am trying to do is—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I just want to say one thing.

Committee members attacked us saying that we are being very partisan. I recognize that we used the words “abandon the radical job-destroying decree”. I can understand how that may seem partisan to members of the Liberal Party. I can understand that.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Mr. Chair, I am rising on a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: In our opinion, it is obvious that this is a radical job-destroying decree, and that is what people are telling us. That is all I wanted to say.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Mr. Chair, I am rising on a point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Deltell, but I have to give the floor to Mrs. Chatel.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: We heard what Mr. Deltell—

The Chair: I understand that we heard what he had to say and I will ask him to be brief, but he has the floor for now.

[*English*]

Mr. Brandon Leslie: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, I think it is a shame that a woman is preventing me from speaking, but that's the way it goes.

Mr. Chair, what we disagree with is—

[*English*]

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Deltell. Mr. Leslie has a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deltell, your colleague is rising on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Brandon Leslie: I think perhaps we could clarify this. I read the text of the original motion as well as what Mr. Deltell read. I don't believe it was well stated, but it is, in fact, an amendment to the original motion. We need to be discussing the amended version, which came after. We need to deal with that before we deal with the main motion.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, if you want to propose an amendment to Mr. Simard's motion, you are free to do so. If you want to add short phrases to condemn the minister or what have you, you can do so.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Let's be pragmatic. I'm a logical, efficient man. The reality is that there have been comments made that the Liberals do not appreciate, and I can understand that. It is part of political debate. The thing about the Bloc Québécois motion that we disagree with is the matter of adding an extra day. We would suggest adding an extra hour to meetings that are already scheduled. That would give exactly the same result in terms of time. If we could come to an agreement—

The Chair: Are you proposing a subamendment, Mr. Deltell?

● (1330)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: If the Bloc—

The Chair: What do you think, Mr. Simard?

Do you consider this to be a friendly amendment?

Mr. Mario Simard: Perhaps we may have found a solution to all this the confusion. However, I would just like to point out that, initially, Mr. Deltell, who is acting in good faith, wanted us to hold six meetings.

He changed his mind and now he wants to add hours to meetings that are already scheduled. I agree with him. I have no problem with that. We could add an hour to hear from people from the clean energy industry. To get my NDP colleague and perhaps the Liberal Party to agree, we could also add an hour to hear from certain experts, large mammal biologists. We could add an hour to do that, and we could address this whole issue.

If we agree on that, then we could wrap up with the question that Mr. Boulerice wants to ask.

[English]

Mr. Branden Leslie: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair, just to offer some clarity.

The Chair: That's not a point of order, offering clarity.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I know. It's a point of order because...it does offer clarity.

Mr. Deltell read the motion as amended. He read the entirety of it. We technically should be debating his amended motion.

The Chair: It's Mr. Simard's amended motion.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Yes—as amended by Mr. Deltell.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, could you read Mr. Simard's motion as amended by you?

Perhaps we can all agree on it and continue with debate.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, I wouldn't want anyone to interrupt me and say that I am repeating what I have already said.

The Chair: You are proposing an amendment to Mr. Simard's motion.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Wait a minute.

I am going to repeat what I proposed earlier.

When we talk about the Government of Quebec, the provincial sector and the rally that took place, we are talking about facts. The committee will invite representatives from Boralex and Hydro-Québec, like we asked. The environment minister is the only one who did not want to come and testify. That is exactly what I said earlier.

The Chair: Okay.

What I need from you is the wording of the amendment.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: You have it.

The Chair: That is an entirely different motion.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: So it's—

The Chair: We are going to suspend briefly.

We are really short on resources and we have another period of approximately 15 minutes left. Unfortunately, I will have to dismiss the witnesses.

That being said, witnesses, you contributed a lot to the debate and we are very grateful to you for that. I think we really touched on a lot of—

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Chair, I don't usually do this, but I sincerely apologize to our witnesses. I thought that things would move more quickly.

I encourage the witnesses to submit documents to the committee. If they want the content of those documents to be included in the report, I am committed to working with them to make that happen.

The Chair: Great.

We will now suspend briefly so that we can draft an amendment that is in keeping with what Mr. Deltell wants to do. That will help us to be better organized later on.

Thank you to the witnesses.

• (1330) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1335)

The Chair: We will now resume the meeting.

I think I understand better now. Everyone has the text of the original motion. Mr. Deltell's amendment is found in the shaded part.

We will proceed with the vote, but first we will debate Mr. Deltell's amendment. I've lost track of things.

Mr. Mario Simard: I think we've sorted it out, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

I think that Mr. Martel and Mr. Leslie wanted to speak to the original motion.

Mr. Richard Martel: That's right.

The Chair: Okay. We are going to start fresh.

Mr. Mario Simard: What we are going to do is simply replace “That the committee add an additional two extra hours to the present study to study the potential effects”.

What we are proposing is that the next meeting be three hours long instead of two.

The Chair: Okay.

What I have here—

Mr. Mario Simard: I'm talking about my motion.

The Chair: Yes, but it's your motion as amended by Mr. Deltell—

Mr. Mario Simard: No. I'm talking about my motion.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mario Simard: Rather than writing “a meeting”, I am proposing that we write “two hours”.

The Chair: You want us to write “two additional hours”. Is that correct?

Mr. Mario Simard: Yes, I am proposing that we write “two additional hours for the present study to study the potential effects”.

We will try to extend the meeting. If I understand Mr. Deltell correctly, instead of adding an additional meeting, he wants us to change a two-hour meeting into a three-hour meeting.

I agree with that.

The Chair: Okay.

We will do what we can, although sometimes our meetings come up on question period. If it happens, it happens. Everyone will understand.

Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I would still like us to vote on the initial amendments that I proposed. They are fundamental.

The Chair: Okay.

Since no one else wants to speak, we will proceed with the vote on the original amendment, as presented by Mr. Deltell.

We will proceed to the vote.

((Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4))

Mr. Mario Simard: If we are voting on my motion now, we just need to change—

The Chair: I don't think you can amend your own motion.

If someone could—

Hon. Mona Fortier: I will amend it.

The Chair: Okay, Mrs. Fortier. You have the floor.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I propose that we add three hours.

The Chair: You are proposing that the committee add two additional hours. Is that correct?

Mr. Simard, even though it isn't your amendment, could you provide some clarification?

• (1340)

Mr. Mario Simard: We said that it would be two hours.

The Chair: So we are talking about two additional hours added to meetings that are already scheduled.

Mr. Mario Simard: That's right.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I read that somewhere, but I can't remember where.

The Chair: It is proposed that an additional hour be added to the meetings that are already scheduled.

Ms. Fortier, is that the amendment you're proposing? You're proposing that we add one hour to the meetings that are already scheduled, and we have two scheduled right now, so that makes sense.

Hon. Mona Fortier: That's a very good idea.

The Chair: Can we vote on that?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Do we have to vote?

Is there a consensus, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Since there is a consensus, there is no need to vote. It is unanimous.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I like consensus.

The Chair: Thank you to everyone.

With that, I will adjourn the meeting.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Mr. Chair, we voted on the amendment. Can we now vote on the motion?

The Chair: It's true. You're absolutely right. I am in too much of a rush.

Yes, we can vote. Do members agree on the motion as amended? Yes. Great.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Chair, are we having an in camera meeting after this?

The Chair: No. We changed the notice. There's no in camera meeting. Originally, the analysts wanted some guidance, but they feel it can wait.

Mr. Dan Mazier: When are we having our next meetings?

The Chair: They will be on the 16th and 18th, as far as I'm concerned.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I thought the original motion was that we were supposed to do it before the House—

Hon. Mona Fortier: No. That was not adopted.

Mr. Dan Mazier: We were supposed to complete the study before the House was gathered. I thought that was the original intent of this motion.

The Chair: We'll check that. Just a second.

I don't have the original motion in front of me, Mr. Mazier, but I'm told that it's silent on the next two meetings. If somebody thinks differently, please tell me.

We can check, if you want, Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Okay, because we already have things piled up. We have the net-zero accelerator initiative and—

The Chair: Oh, I know. We have lots of work to do, for sure. I agree.

Mr. Dan Mazier: It's \$8 billion.

The Chair: I'll just pause for a second so that I can consult the original motion and give you the right answer.

Mr. Mazier, we've looked at the motion. There is no specified timeline.

Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: On that point, Mr. Chair, if you look at the motion, paragraph (d) states, "Order that the government produce all socio-economic analysis completed on the impact of the federal decree, including all projected job loss analysis, within 14 days of the motion being adopted."

The Chair: Yes. That's for the government to produce that, but it doesn't say when we should have our meetings.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: It's there.

The Chair: I agree that's what the motion says—and it's up to the government to respond—but in terms of setting a timeline for our meetings, the motion appears to be silent.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Mr. Chair, before we close the meeting off, I'd like to move that we have Minister Guilbeault and officials appear before this committee before—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I'm rising on a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Branden Leslie: —September 15, before the consultation period expires.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Mr. Chair, I'm rising on a point of order.

The Chair: Mrs. Chatel.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I think that my colleague is changing the subject. We are now being called upon to vote on a motion.

The Chair: We did that. It was adopted by consensus.

• (1345)

[*English*]

Are you presenting a motion, Mr. Leslie?

Mr. Branden Leslie: Yes. I would like to move that Minister Guilbeault and officials appear before this committee regarding the caribou study and the emergency decree before September 15, before the expiry—

The Chair: Is that a motion?

I don't see anyone who wants to debate the motion. Can we vote on the motion?

Mr. Branden Leslie: Sure.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Was that motion tabled in both official languages?

We did not even get it. I'm sorry, but this was done on the fly.

[*English*]

Mr. Branden Leslie: It's regarding today's topic, so I think I can move it.

The Chair: We need it in both official languages.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I just did it on the fly. It's regarding the topic of today's meeting, so I can absolutely—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Chair, it's a matter of the rules.

I will not vote blindly like this at the end of a meeting on the whims of some who want a good news clip. Let's be a little more serious, please.

[*English*]

Mr. Branden Leslie: Do you not want the minister here?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: One moment, please.

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Since we have interpreters here, Mr. Leslie can move his motion verbally. Then, obviously, the interpreters will interpret it, so I think he has the right to do that. I'm proposing that we simply vote on it.

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Chair, there is still the matter of the rules.

The motion to undertake this study indicates that the committee wants to hear from the minister.

The Chair: Yes, we agree on that.

Mr. Mario Simard: We agree on that. Why move another motion—

The Chair: It's because he wants the minister to appear sooner.

Mr. Mario Simard: You see. That is the joy of translation, because—

The Chair: Yes, I understand.

The member wants the minister to appear before Parliament resumes, and from what I've heard, he will likely come and see us on September 18. That is not what Mr. Leslie wants, so he moved a motion. I am therefore proposing that we vote on that motion.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Chair, I am rising on a point of order.

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Chair, can we debate the motion?

The Chair: Yes, we can debate it if you wish—

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I'm rising on a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I'm very uncomfortable with the fact that having the interpretation is suddenly enough for both official languages to be respected in committee. I have never seen that before. If that were the case, there would be no obligation to send motions—

The Chair: Apparently, that's the rule. We didn't just make it up. You can object to it, but that's the rule.

Mr. Martel wants to speak to Mr. Leslie's motion.

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Chair, I think it is extremely important that Minister Guilbeault come and testify before the suggested dates because we need to produce a report as quickly as possible, so that Minister Guilbeault can see that his decree does not make any sense and that he should not impose it.

The Chair: If there are no further speakers, we will vote on Mr. Leslie's verbal motion.

Mr. Mario Simard: Could he simply reread it? I did not understand it properly.

The Chair: Mr. Leslie, could you repeat your motion for the benefit of committee members, please?

[*English*]

Mr. Branden Leslie: I move that Minister Guilbeault and officials appear before our committee prior to the September 15 end of the emergency decree consultation.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Okay.

With that, we will proceed to the vote.

(Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

● (1350)

The Chair: The motion is defeated.

The meeting is adjourned.

I hope you all have a nice evening. I look forward to seeing you soon.

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