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Chair: Angelo Iacono



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

[Translation]

Good morning, colleagues.

[English]

Today is meeting number 14 of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format and is in public. We have witness testimony for the full two hours.

Those in person, please follow the health and safety guidelines on the cards found on your table to prevent audio feedback incidents.

[Translation]

Before we begin, I have a few announcements to make about study budgets. I would like the committee to adopt the four budgets distributed by the clerk a few weeks ago, since we need these amounts to reimburse the witnesses for the cost of their appearances and cover the expenses of our own logistics.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt a budget in the amount of \$500 for the briefing with Environment and Climate Change Canada?

[English]

All in favour....

David Bexte (Bow River, CPC): I have a point of order. We're not getting any translation.

The Chair: I'm sorry about that.

• (1105)

[Translation]

I'll start over.

I would like the committee to adopt the four budgets distributed by the clerk a few weeks ago, since we need these amounts to reimburse the witnesses for the cost of their appearances and cover the expenses of our own logistics.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt a budget in the amount of \$500 for the briefing with Environment and Climate Change Canada?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt a budget in the amount of \$500 for the briefing with the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada and the Canada Water Agency?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt a budget in the amount of \$47,700 for the study of the electric vehicle availability standard?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt a budget in the amount of \$49,500 for the study of the effectiveness, potential improvements and capability of Canada's 2030 emissions reduction plan?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I've lost my bet, so I owe a coffee. I thought that Mr. Leslie would challenge one of the amounts and that, as a result, I could have had coffee with you.

[English]

A voice: [Technical difficulty—Editor]

The Chair: I missed you.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

The committee is beginning its study on the essential habitat of the copper redhorse in the Verchères Islands.

I would now like to welcome our guests who will be testifying today.

[English]

From the Department of Natural Resources, we have Jeff Labonté, associate deputy minister, by video conference; from the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, we have Patricia Brady, Madame Elisabeth Gill and Mr. Bram Sepers; and from the Major Projects Office, we have Dawn Farrell.

[Translation]

From the Montreal Port Authority, we have Julie Gascon, Julien Baudry and Nathalee Loubier.

It's a pleasure to meet you. We're happy to welcome you to the committee.

[English]

We will hear opening statements from the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, the Port of Montreal and the Major Projects Office.

[Translation]

Witnesses will each have five minutes to make their presentation. While they are answering questions or making their presentation, I will hold up a card to indicate that they have one minute left to finish up. To avoid interrupting, I will flip the card over, to let them know to please end their sentence.

We'll start now with Ms. Brady.

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

● (1110)

[English]

Patricia Brady (Vice-President, Strategic Policy and Programs, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

My name is Patricia Brady. I'm the vice-president of strategic policy and programs at the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. I'm joined here by two colleagues, Bram Sepers, executive director of communications at the agency; and Elisabeth Gill, director of our Quebec regional office, who is onscreen.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that we're on the unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation.

[Translation]

We are pleased to appear before the committee today to provide information on the environmental assessment of the port terminal expansion project at Contrecoeur.

We will also discuss the provisions of the Impact Assessment Act, or IAA, related to projects on federal lands that apply separately to the compensation project.

The IAA sets out impact assessment requirements for major projects. Those projects are listed in regulations under the IAA called the "Project List". That list includes only major projects. Since 2019, only about nine projects per year have met the thresholds in the list to be subject to the federal assessment process.

The port terminal expansion project at Contrecoeur is a major project and was assessed under the Impact Assessment Act's predecessor legislation, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012. This assessment, which included indigenous consultation and public participation, concluded in February 2021, with the Minister of the Environment's report and decision issued on March 1, 2021, which included conditions to mitigate adverse effects, including a habitat compensation plan related to the copper redhorse.

[English]

The implementation of that compensation plan was separately subject to provisions of the Impact Assessment Act that apply to projects that aren't designated on a project list and that are carried

out on federal lands such as national parks, military bases and first nations reserves. Those requirements are separate and very different from the requirements for major designated projects under the act.

To give you a sense of volume, more than 1,000 non-designated projects are subject to these federal lands requirements each year, and they include a broad range of project types of varying sizes, such as constructing office buildings and hospitals, installing wharves and breakwaters, replacing culverts and installing water treatment systems. For those types of projects on federal lands, relevant federal authorities are responsible for determining the potential environmental effects of the project. The Impact Assessment Agency has no role in those determinations under the act.

There are more than 75 federal authorities in total, including departments, agencies, Crown corporations, ports and airport authorities, among others.

Under the act, before undertaking a project on federal lands or authorizing or funding one, the federal authority must first determine whether a project could cause significant adverse environmental effects. This includes a requirement for public transparency. At a minimum, a notice called a "notice of intent" must be posted on the Impact Assessment Registry, inviting the public to provide comments. Federal authorities have broad discretion to decide how they'll make their determination, including the information they need or additional public engagement activities, given the specific project circumstances.

IAAC's role in federal lands assessments is limited. Its two main functions are as follows. The first is to provide guidance to federal authorities about their obligations under the IAA in respect of these federal land provisions. The second is to host information on the authorities' federal lands assessments on the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry, which IAAC maintains, though each federal authority has its own account and makes postings to the registry directly.

Thanks again for the opportunity to be here, and my colleagues and I would be happy to answer questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Brady.

[Translation]

Julie Gascon, you have the floor for five minutes.

Julie Gascon (President and Chief Executive Officer, Montreal Port Authority): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the Contrecoeur expansion project, a generational project that meets a strategic need for Quebec and Canada.

Every day, the Port of Montreal and its workers support thousands of jobs, including exporters and manufacturers, and ensure that essential products arrive across the country. However, to continue to play that role, the Port of Montreal must increase its capacity and act now, as it takes five years to build a terminal.

The Contrecoeur project will create 3,770 jobs per year during construction and more than 10,000 jobs to manage its operations, and it will support nearly 400,000 jobs with the goods that will be transported through it. Among other things, the project will use Canadian materials and build on existing infrastructure, namely the rail network and Highway 30, which provide access to 66% of the Canadian population and to 75% of the country's manufacturing capacity.

In terms of the environment, this is one of the most regulated projects in Canada, and it involves commitments over several decades. The terms and conditions of the project require consultation with federal, provincial and first nations authorities. That is what we have done to satisfy everyone.

Our consultation process has been transparent and ongoing.

In 2012, we held initial meetings with the communities. Following those meetings, between 2016 and 2019, we held public hearings based on an impact assessment report.

In March 2021, the former minister of environment and climate change issued a favourable decision statement with 387 conditions for completion.

In May 2024, we submitted applications for authorization to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

In July and September 2024, we presented the feasibility study and the draft project for the design of facilities for copper redhorse grass beds to first nations, federal and provincial government agencies, cities, regional county municipalities, the Conseil régional de l'environnement de la Montérégie, the Comité de concertation et de valorisation du bassin de la Richelieu in Richelieu, the Zone d'intervention prioritaire des Seigneuries and the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

On April 29, 2025, under the Impact Assessment Act, we posted the notice of intent on the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry for the facilities for copper redhorse grass beds on Île aux Bœufs.

In July 2025, we sent a notification to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada about the start of the preparatory work for the construction of the terminal.

In October 2025, we obtained an initial authorization for compensatory measures.

The support provided by the major projects office has enabled us to continue development without any acceleration measure or regulatory exemption for a very simple reason. Our permits from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans were first issued in 2012, and after the amendments to the act in 2019, we had to redo the process. We then engaged with the Impact Assessment Agency, which issued its decision with 387 conditions in 2021. It's important to understand that the agency's decision followed the Department of

Fisheries and Oceans' confirmation that permits could be issued under the Fisheries Act and the Species at Risk Act.

From 2021 to 2024, we did our work and, in May 2024, we re-submitted our permit applications under the new 2019 legislation.

We have met all the deadlines and followed all the steps required by all the legislation.

Over a period of more than 10 years, we have completed or planned seven compensation plans and 24 monitoring programs. Some of the key measures include the creation of 27.7 hectares of fish habitat in the Boucherville Islands, the planting of more than 40,000 plants, the building of new aquatic grass beds for the copper redhorse, the protection of habitats of bank swallows, waterbirds such as the great blue heron, the kingfisher and the American bittern, and a number of fish and amphibian species, as well as the use of electrical and hybrid equipment to reduce emissions and noise.

• (1115)

[English]

By expanding in Contrecoeur, we use the lowest-carbon mode of transport, which is maritime shipping, and avoid thousands of additional truck kilometres to U.S. ports.

Is my time up?

The Chair: Go ahead and finish your last sentence.

Julie Gascon: If we lack capacity, importers and exporters will rely on the next best option. For us, it's the port of New York.

Our objective is clear. It's to lead by example and show that economic growth and environmental protection can reinforce each other.

• (1120)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gascon.

[English]

The floor is yours, Ms. Dawn Farrell, for five minutes.

Dawn Farrell (Chief Executive Officer, Major Projects Office): Good afternoon. My name is Dawn Farrell. I'm the chief executive officer of the Major Projects Office. Thank you for having me here to discuss the Contrecoeur terminal container project.

As you know, the office was established around two months ago. On September 11, the Contrecoeur terminal container project was referred to the Major Projects Office as part of the first set of projects referred by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister announced a second set of projects last week. We are maintaining the pace and working diligently to find the best path forward for these nation-building projects.

Projects being referred to the office are the kinds of major projects that will build Canada. They are the kinds of projects Canada needs to connect our economy, diversify our industries and trade opportunities, and create high-paying careers, while protecting the environment and upholding the rights of indigenous peoples. Our office has been working closely with the Government of Canada, provinces and territories, industry proponents and indigenous peoples to evaluate projects that would offer the greatest benefits for Canadians and that we can move quickly on to meet the moment.

Major projects have been brought forward in a number of ways, including by proponents, indigenous groups, premiers—through first ministers' meetings—and many other ways through federal departments and ministers.

Once a project is referred to our office, we work with proponents, provinces and territories, and indigenous peoples to find the right path forward for each project. Depending on the type of project and its stage of development, as well as its status, requirements and milestones, this could include many options, including options that focus on streamlining permitting processes and structuring financing.

Many of the projects referred to the office will not be designated under the Building Canada Act. Designation is just one tool the office may recommend, but regulatory streamlining and financing can be accomplished in many ways. We seek the best course of action to advance a given project quickly so the proponents are provided the certainty they need to make their important investment decisions.

With regard to Contrecoeur, at the time it was referred to the office, this project was well advanced in the federal regulatory system, as you've heard today, including having completed federal environmental assessment. Since then, the work of the office has primarily been focused on structuring financing for the project to ensure that investment decisions can be made.

We understand that a federal land assessment under the Impact Assessment Act was conducted for Contrecoeur compensatory measures for the copper redhorse and that this committee may have questions around this process. The office did not play a role in this assessment. As the entities responsible for conducting this federal lands assessment, Environment and Climate Change Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada would be best placed to answer questions this committee may have.

It's my pleasure to answer any questions you may have related to the Major Projects Office here today.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Farrell.

We will start now with the Conservative party for six minutes.

Mr. Ross, the floor is yours.

Ellis Ross (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, CPC): My first question is for Ms. Elisabeth Gill.

This project, you said, was basically approved in 2021, but now we're really looking at outstanding fisheries permits, as per new legislation.

How many permits are we looking at that need approval for this new amendment?

Patricia Brady: I can start that, but I think perhaps Madame Gascon would be better placed to comment on any outstanding permits.

I understand that the Fisheries Act authorization that was outstanding was granted just a couple of weeks ago, in October.

Whether or not there are other federal permits, I'll let my colleagues from the port respond to that.

Julie Gascon: Thank you, Ms. Brady.

Madame Loubier, can you go over the two permits? We've received the first one. What's the outstanding permit?

Nathalee Loubier (Senior Manager, Contrecoeur Environment, Montreal Port Authority): The first permit that we received is a DFO permit, and it is for compensation for the copper redhorse. We received this one in October 2025.

Ellis Ross: Are you talking about environmental offsets?

Nathalee Loubier: Yes.

Ellis Ross: That's where my question is leading. Are the environmental offsets you're talking about specifically in relation to the copper redhorse habitat?

• (1125)

Nathalee Loubier: Yes.

Ellis Ross: Is it proven that compensation will actually benefit the copper redhorse, or is it something that we're trying?

Julie Gascon: The first permit is related to the compensation work that we will be doing for the copper redhorse. Over the last many months, we've been working hand-in-hand with our colleagues at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, but also with our colleagues at the provincial level to evaluate whether the compensation work we are proposing is going to work.

This was done in full collaboration. The goal here would be to compensate at the Île aux Bœufs, which is a bit of a.... There are two little islands that are north of Contrecoeur—

Ellis Ross: Let me interrupt you there. I read the report, but my specific question was whether there were any studies done to show that the offsets would actually benefit the copper redhorse directly, or whether this is just a trial to see if the copper redhorse will benefit. We are talking about a species at risk here.

[Translation]

Julie Gascon: I'll ask Ms. Loubier to answer that question.

Nathalee Loubier: You want to know whether the compensation plan for Île aux Bœufs will make up for the grass-beds affected by the project.

Patrick Bonin (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Chair, the witness may not be aware that she can use simultaneous translation.

Nathalee Loubier: Okay.

Is this the environmental impact assessment report that you read?

I'm asking because the Department of Fisheries and Oceans received multiple reports with our permit application. These reports include the feasibility study showing that our work on Île aux Bœufs can compensate for the grass-beds affected by the project. Hydrodynamic modelling has been carried out. A number of studies have been carried out to show that the project will work.

[English]

Ellis Ross: Thank you.

My other question is for Ms. Dawn Farrell.

You're talking about helping out the Canadian government in terms of regulatory streamlining, but the only streamlining we seem to need here is the Department of Fisheries and Oceans permits and authorizations. I've worked with DFO. They are very risk-averse. They are very meticulous, so how is your office going to work with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in terms of the regulatory streamlining you spoke of?

Dawn Farrell: In this case, almost exclusively the work for Contrecoeur will be on the financing of the project. We need about \$2.3 billion to finish building Contrecoeur. We're working with their offices to arrange that financing through several agencies, and that's where most of the work is. In terms of regulatory—

Ellis Ross: Is there no work with DFO for the outstanding permits?

Dawn Farrell: No, we do not see a need to do that work. The Port of Montreal is well ahead in that work and has already undertaken most of that work, so we do not see any regulatory streamlining there.

Ellis Ross: There will be no fast-tracking of this permit requirement from DFO. You'll just allow the regular time frame to take place.

Dawn Farrell: Yes, currently, their regular time frame is working. You can ask Ms. Gascon how she feels about that, but we currently see that most of the work with them will be on the financing.

Ellis Ross: If there's no fast-tracking, can I get an estimate of when the permits are expected to be approved by DFO?

Julie Gascon: Sir, we received the letter of completion of our file in August of this year. As Ms. Loubier indicated, there are two permits that are needed. The first permit was received in October of this year, and the second permit is expected in November.

Ellis Ross: I'll probably leave this here as a placeholder for later on, but my next round of questioning will be around treaty rights and aboriginal rights and title. I'll probably ask that question of the Impact Assessment Agency and then later on transfer that over to the Major Projects Office.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

For six minutes, we have Ms. Miedema.

Shannon Miedema (Halifax, Lib.): Thank you to all of the witnesses for coming today.

I will start with the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada.

The report states that the new dredging area would be within the range and critical habitat of the copper redhorse and specifies that all the changes will be analyzed and flagged as required and any authorizations issued by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Can you tell us how large of an area of critical habitat in square metres is directly affected by the new dredging area and maybe a bit on the methodology used for this mapping?

Patricia Brady: I'm afraid I can't give you the specifics on the area affected, but the port may be able to answer that question.

Julie Gascon: In terms of the number of grass-beds that exist right now in the St. Lawrence, where the copper redhorse eats, there are 30,000 hectares. The project will intervene and impact 2.34 hectares total. That's 2.34 hectares out of the 30,000 hectares that exist in the St. Lawrence River, which is the habitat where the copper redhorse feeds, not the habitat where the copper redhorse reproduces, which is in the Richelieu River.

Shannon Miedema: Will the new habitat, the compensated new habitat, be created before the dredging begins? I don't know if this question is best for Ms. Brady.

Julie Gascon: I can answer that question as well. All of the compensation work will be done ahead of the project. The intent is that we will be putting 3.24 hectares of grass-bed in an area called l'Île aux Boeufs, which is a little bit north, in the same corridor but a little bit north of Contrecoeur. It's great, because the compensation work that we're doing is achieving two things.

These little islands are also impacted by shore erosion. We will be building kind of a wall, like a *digue*, as we say in French, that will slowly impact a little bit the flow of the current, giving good chances for the grass-bed to grow. We will also do a lot of cleanup, because there are sunken docks and a whole bunch of debris there. We'll be doing a lot of cleanup around those islands and giving those islands a chance as well. Within 10 years, the grass-bed that we will have planted... It's a bit like when you do your garden: You plant with enough distance so that the plants can grow. We'll have double within six years, and it will have tripled within 15 years to almost 12.64 hectares, I think.

Shannon Miedema: Excellent.

Can you tell me how this newly created habitat is going to be monitored? What would happen if the monitoring shows that the habitat isn't functioning as intended?

Julie Gascon: As part of our compensation work in the 387 conditions that we have, we have a lot of follow-up programs. These are programs that allow us to look at everything from the trees that we are planting to the habitat for the starlings, the habitat for the frogs and the grass-beds for the copper redhorse. We had to follow up, and we have to make sure that they take hold. The great thing about dealing with the Port of Montreal is that it's 200 years old. We are a federal institution, and if something were to happen, we would continue to support and help to ensure that the grass-bed holds well.

We do have experience. We created a 27.7-hectare fish habitat around the Îles de Boucherville. We probably are, within the country, a really strong, knowledgeable entity on the copper redhorse. Just to put it in perspective rapidly, by the time we're done building Contrecoeur, the Port of Montreal will have invested \$17 million in the compensation plan for the copper redhorse.

I mentioned before in my response that this is the feeding area. The grass-bed has these little crustaceans that stay there, and it's a big feeding area for them where they go. It's a fish that lives about 35 years. It spawns in the Richelieu River and in the Chambly Basin. I would just remind everyone that where this little fish spawns and lives the first two years of his life before going to the feeding habitat in the St. Lawrence, and then comes back year after year for 35 years in the Richelieu, there is no speed limit in the Chambly Basin, yet they spawn normally in the height of summer. That's where most of the pleasure craft are operating, of course.

We are also working with the producers, the agricultural community, as well, because that's also when they put the fertilizer in, and there are a lot of chemicals. We've worked with them to reduce the number of chemicals going in. With our \$17 million, we're building the biggest fridge and the biggest food area for them, as much as we can, but we'll need to work in collaboration to address where it spawns, because I think we need to look at this little fish in its entirety. It's been at risk for 20 years, well before the port. We'll need to work in collaboration with others to support this species.

• (1135)

Shannon Miedema: I'll stop there.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gascon.

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

Patrick Bonin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us.

My question is for the officials from the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada.

When we look at the situation, we basically see two technical issues. First, the notice of intent or public notice for the compensation plan has disappeared. Second, there was no alert to inform the public about this consultation.

Do you consider this consultation exemplary and conducive to public participation?

Bram Sepers (Executive Director, Communications, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada): I can answer that question.

[*English*]

For the initial notice, it was posted on April 29, for a period of just over 30 days, to May 30.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: Given the technical issues, do you consider this approach exemplary?

[*English*]

Bram Sepers: Okay. I'm sorry—I would defer to the port authority on their consultation.

[*Translation*]

Julie Gascon: The Port of Montreal has strictly adhered to its legal and regulatory obligations.

Regarding the alert, I asked all my employees to register, because it must be done. Furthermore, the alerts were successfully issued.

Patrick Bonin: Is this an exemplary process?

I would like a response from the agency. Do you consider the process exemplary, given the lack of an alert and the change in the content of the notice?

[*English*]

Patricia Brady: I started by saying that the agency's role in federal lands authority is limited, so we don't conduct audits of whether they're meeting their obligations.

In this case, though, the notice of intent was, in fact, posted. That's the only requirement in the act, so it was done. I believe the port undertook other consultation activities and public hearings, which the port could comment on. That would have added to and amplified the public consultation notice that was put on our registry.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: Okay.

Did you receive any feedback during your consultation?

Julien Baudry (Chief of Staff and Vice-President, Communications and External Affairs, Montreal Port Authority): Thank you for your question.

Regarding the exemplary nature of our measures, as noted, we fulfilled the obligations. We also went above and beyond the requirements for public events.

Patrick Bonin: Have you received any feedback?

Julien Baudry: Yes.

During open house events, we had—

Patrick Bonin: Open houses aren't consultations. By law, consultations must be carried out online and in public. Again, open houses aren't consultations.

Did you receive any feedback during the consultations?

Julien Baudry: We haven't received any verbal or written feedback.

Patrick Bonin: You didn't receive any feedback during your consultation. When did your consultation start and when did it end?

Julien Baudry: Our consultation lasted the required amount of time, from April 29 until the 30-day deadline. There was also an extension period, since we didn't make a decision until October 9.

Patrick Bonin: So you had two consultation periods. Is that right?

Julien Baudry: We posted a notice that complied with the 30-day legal requirement. At the end of that period, we continued to engage with the public and answer questions, including at public events broadcast on the radio, in the media and in an open manner.

Patrick Bonin: These events aren't consultations.

That's why you referred to August 29 when providing information to the Bloc Québécois. It wasn't your consultation, was it?

Julien Baudry: It all depends on how you define the word "consultation". For us, consulting and answering questions is also an opportunity to receive feedback.

Patrick Bonin: I'm talking about a mandatory legislative consultation.

Julien Baudry: We complied with the 30-day period.

Patrick Bonin: Okay.

In your opinion, can the destruction of the critical habitat of an endangered species be considered a significant adverse environmental effect?

Julie Gascon: Since you asked, I can tell you that we'll be working on 2.34 hectares of copper redhorse foraging habitat in the St. Lawrence River, but that we'll be rebuilding much more than this.

Patrick Bonin: I know, Ms. Gascon. I'm sorry, but that wasn't my question. Please understand that I don't have much time. When I ask questions, please try to answer them.

Can the destruction of the critical habitat of an endangered species be considered a significant adverse environmental effect?

• (1140)

Julien Baudry: In our opinion, this issue falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The Montreal Port Authority doesn't have the authority to rule on this matter. We aren't the legal authority on this issue.

Patrick Bonin: I gather that, for you, the destruction of a species' critical habitat—

Julien Baudry: Mr. Bonin, that's not what I said. I said that the responsible organization should answer that question. Of course, we must comply with the legislation, implement measures and design a project after consulting with the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada and also the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Patrick Bonin: The Species at Risk Act calls for the selection of other possible sites when species at risk are involved. In this case, the species at risk is emblematic of Quebec.

Have you considered other sites for the Île aux Bœufs compensation work, particularly sites where the work wouldn't adversely affect the critical habitat of the copper redhorse?

If so, what are these sites?

Julie Gascon: Before giving the floor to Ms. Loubier, I would like to say that the Contrecoeur terminal has been moved as far west as possible to minimize its impact.

Patrick Bonin: I'm not talking about the terminal, but about the compensation work. Have other sites been considered for the compensation work?

Nathalee Loubier: Yes.

Starting in May 2022, four potential sites were assessed: Île aux Bœufs, Île aux Prunes, the eastern tip of Île Bouchard and Île Hurteau. During the feasibility study, when grass-beds were identified in 2022 on Île aux Bœufs and Île aux Prunes, there weren't any grass-beds where the dikes will be built.

To get back to your question, in 2022—

Patrick Bonin: I'll stop you there.

The legislation states that, if you're requesting a compensation plan, you must first have submitted your project as part of the legal regulatory process.

Did you submit anything?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bonin. Your time is up.

I want to remind all the members that witnesses need time to answer their questions. Otherwise, the interpreters have a hard time doing their job. I know that this topic involves a great deal of discussion and raises many issues. Please keep your question short so that you can get a more specific answer.

In short, keep in mind that interpretation is taking place when you speak.

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

[English]

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

I'd like to start with Ms. Gascon.

Did you approach the federal government for it to be referred to the MPO?

Julie Gascon: The project was referred to the MPO. No, we did not approach them.

Braden Leslie: Did the federal government approach you about it?

Julie Gascon: The Contrecoeur project was deemed a project of significant importance. Due to the categorization of the project, we were referred to the MPO, and we've engaged with the MPO ever since.

Braden Leslie: When did you find out that you were being referred to the MPO, and who told you this information?

[Translation]

Julien Baudry: We were informed at the major projects office before the official announcement. It was between 24 and 48 hours before the press conference.

[English]

Branden Leslie: You were advised just a day before there was an announcement from the federal government that, despite their not talking to you in any way and despite your not coming to them, they deemed that you would be referred to the Major Projects Office for a project that's been under way since you first applied in 2016. Is that correct?

Julie Gascon: Yes, that is correct.

Branden Leslie: Does it seem odd that, out of the blue, you were referred without asking to be referred?

Julie Gascon: There was a lot of consultation and a lot of work that was done, and this could be a question that could be asked of people much higher than me. There was a lot of discussion as to which project would be deemed to provide an essential contribution as a major project, a project of national interest.

Branden Leslie: In order to find out whether you would meet those criteria, what information did you provide to the government and when?

Julie Gascon: We've been working with the Government of Canada for years on this project—

Branden Leslie: The government lives in silos, so it's highly unlikely that the government was able to collate all this great information.

I'm very curious about what information, in the immediate lead-up to being referred, you provided to the Government of Canada.

Julie Gascon: I'm sorry, sir, but the work that was done for the Contrecoeur project is work that has been going on for decades. We've been working with Fisheries and Oceans, with Transport Canada, with Finance Canada and with various departments. We had meetings with multiple departments at the same time. People and the departments were very well aware of the importance of this project and the work that has been carried out with this project.

By referring us to the MPO, it allowed us to continue the work, as Mrs. Farrell has clearly stated, to finalize and structure our financing. The major project allows us to have a conversation with all of the departments, bringing everybody together to ensure that we move forward as a federal public service and as a federal project, of course, in a concise and rigorous manner.

• (1145)

Branden Leslie: You were moving ahead with this project. The government then passed Bill C-5, which you have said you didn't think you were going to need to use, despite there being one outstanding permit still.

I'm curious about two things.

One, if that permit is not approved, will you go to the MPO to have that overturned vis-à-vis the powers under Bill C-5?

Two, since you were planning this project entirely without the MPO, what exactly are you expecting them to do for you other than this newfound offer to get you money?

Julie Gascon: In terms of the work we've done to receive our permits, our file was completed in August, so in August we received a letter "L". We received our first permit in October. We fi-

nalized all of our consultation with first nations and with all of the stakeholders involved in the decisions for the permit, and everything points to the fact that the second permit will be received in November.

Mrs. Farrell may be better placed than me to answer this question, but my understanding of the Major Projects Office is that, yes, it is provisioned to accelerate projects—that's one thing—but it also acts as an important one-source or one-stop shop for a project, so if I have a problem or an issue, I go directly to the MPO, which organizes and supports us in finding innovative ways of financing and innovative ways of looking at things.

Branden Leslie: Can I jump in there? What are those innovative ways of financing? It was mentioned that there would be various sources under the MPO that they would find, I assume, as a federally regulated port authority, of entirely public money. How were you going to pay for this project? You were about to start building it anyways, and now the MPO has swooped in with a promise to discover new taxpayer money or funds from across various departments. How were you going to build the project before this?

Julie Gascon: At this point, I cannot speak to the financing structure for the project, because we are in negotiations.

Branden Leslie: Is it funded right now?

Julie Gascon: My time is up.

The Chair: I'll let you respond.

Julie Gascon: At this particular moment, we're discussing with the MPO and the various departments that are involved what the best structure would be to finance this project.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gascon. Thank you, Mr. Leslie.

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

[English]

Bruce Fanjoy (Carleton, Lib.): Thank you, witnesses.

Ms. Farrell, I'll go to you first.

Can you clarify for this committee the difference between a project being referred to the Major Projects Office versus being in the national interest? Also, what is your role or your office's role in each of those cases?

Dawn Farrell: There are major projects and there are major projects that are in the national interest. Major projects that are referred to us are in various stages of development. Some of them, like Contrecoeur, are almost all the way through their regulatory process, and there's not much help that they need there.

On the financing question, we are working with these federal projects to see how to coordinate financing from, for example, the Canada Infrastructure Bank and the Canada Growth Fund, as well as looking at whether there are other private sources of capital that can be used to ensure that the Port of Montreal has sufficient funds to continue to build and finish the project in a timely manner. That work is under way, and we expect to be finishing that work soon. We're working closely with Ms. Gascon and her team.

In other cases, projects can be referred and can be sent to us as designated projects, and the differentiation there is that those projects would be in earlier stages. Those projects need a decision about whether or not they should be built in advance of all the work that needs to be done to coordinate the regulatory, the first nations and the work that needs to be done on the financing.

So far, at this point, we have not had any projects that have come through the act as designated projects. Most of the projects we're working on are in various states of development, but we do expect, over the course of time, that one or two projects of national interest will be designated. At that point, there is a single process that allows for a single minister to use the.... We still end up going through all the different departments to do all the work—there's no corner cutting—but it's a bit of a two-step process whereby a decision is made that the project is in the national interest and then a two-year process is undertaken to end up with one permit and one set of conditions for all the different agencies that are involved.

• (1150)

Bruce Fanjoy: That being the case, is it correct to say that all of the regulatory obligations that exist for Contrecoeur are the same as they would have been had this process begun five or 10 years ago?

Dawn Farrell: Currently, all of the regulatory processes that the Port of Montreal has been through with Contrecoeur are well under way and well understood. The permits are close to being completed. There is one more permit, as I understand it, in November. I do not anticipate—our office does not anticipate—that there's any need for any additional assistance there, and we see the same thing on a number of fronts.

What is needed, though, is the final financing package, so that Ms. Gascon and her team have the certainty they need to finish the waterworks they're undertaking, to finish the agreements they're undertaking and to start the major part of the project, which will be finished in five years.

The other work we will do with the Port of Montreal and their team is to ensure that, as they go through the construction process, they have the streamlining they need, so that we do meet the objectives of the build within the time frame that she intends to build in and the project does stay on budget and on time.

Bruce Fanjoy: Thank you.

Ms. Gascon, can you please outline for us in about 40 seconds the economic impact and the strategic importance of expanding the port of Montreal?

Julie Gascon: In terms of any economic impact for the Contrecoeur expansion project, during the construction it's 3,770 jobs. After the terminal is in operation, it's 10,000 jobs, and it supports over 400,000 jobs.

What the phase one of the Contrecoeur project—or this phase for the Contrecoeur project—brings is to increase the capacity of the port of Montreal by 60%. The capacity of the terminal will be 1.15 million TEUs. TEUs are 20-foot equivalents, or containers.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Gascon.

Thank you, Mr. Fanjoy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bonin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Patrick Bonin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, was an alert sent out regarding the compensation plan?

[*English*]

Bram Sepers: There was not an alert sent.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: There wasn't any alert.

In terms of the port, given that you want good consultations, are you comfortable with the lack of alert and feedback in an important consultation regarding the critical habitat of a species at risk?

Julien Baudry: In the past, we've submitted a number of requests through the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry. We rarely receive any feedback.

Patrick Bonin: Okay.

Do you feel comfortable?

Julien Baudry: We always welcome feedback, but it isn't our place to say whether we should have received feedback. The process was followed.

Patrick Bonin: However, there wasn't any feedback given the lack of alert, for example.

Would you feel comfortable repeating the consultation process to ensure that you receive feedback?

We know that some people would like to provide feedback at this time.

Julien Baudry: The documents were posted online. The people could have given us some feedback.

Patrick Bonin: Would you agree to repeat this process, given the lack of feedback and alert?

Julien Baudry: This type of situation would have a financial impact and would cause significant delays to the project.

Patrick Bonin: The copper redhorse may be affected, but for you, money and time matter more than protecting the species.

Is that it?

Julien Baudry: In simple terms, we followed the steps required by the Impact Assessment Act.

Patrick Bonin: You said that you're concerned about the financial impact, as opposed to the impact on the copper redhorse.

Julien Baudry: Mr. Bonin, in all honesty, that's not what I said.

Patrick Bonin: Okay, but since the copper redhorse may be affected, would you be willing to carry out proper consultations again to confirm the lack of an impact?

Julien Baudry: Mr. Bonin, we followed the process set out by the legislation—

Patrick Bonin: Okay, so you don't want to do them. That's my understanding.

Julien Baudry: We followed the process—

• (1155)

Patrick Bonin: I asked you whether you were willing to do them again. You didn't agree.

Julien Baudry: Mr. Bonin, we followed the process—

Patrick Bonin: So the answer is no. You answered my question. That's my understanding.

The Chair: Mr. Bonin, please.

Patrick Bonin: Mr. Chair, I'm expecting simple answers, but I'm not getting any. I'm sorry.

Now you're telling me that you received your permit regarding the Species at Risk Act. It seems that you received this permit for the compensation work. I checked the species at risk public registry. The legislation states that, if you have a permit, it must be in the registry. After a number of weeks, no permit has been entered in the registry.

You don't have a valid permit at this time, since the permit isn't listed in the registry.

Nathalee Loubier: Are you referring to the Fisheries Act registry?

Patrick Bonin: No, I'm talking about the species at risk public registry.

Nathalee Loubier: You would need to speak with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans about this registry.

Patrick Bonin: However, you know that your permit is invalid right now because it isn't in this registry.

Nathalee Loubier: You would need to check with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans regarding the species at risk public registry.

Patrick Bonin: I'll talk about the process for obtaining this permit. One condition says that, to obtain a permit to destroy the habitat of an endangered species, you must assess alternate sites.

As part of this specific permit application with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, did you submit assessments of alternate sites?

Nathalee Loubier: Yes. It's in the feasibility study submitted to a number of organizations in May 2024, as well as in the pre-planning study also submitted to DFO and the organizations that Ms. Gascon referred to at the start.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bonin.

Patrick Bonin: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mrs. Anstey, you have five minutes.

Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC): Thank you.

I'd like to ask Mrs. Farrell some questions with respect to the Major Projects Office.

In your opening statement, you talked about the different ways that projects are referred. Is there any independent oversight of how your office prioritizes or manages files, or is this all handled internally and behind closed doors?

Dawn Farrell: Do you mean internally to the government or internally...?

There are a lot of projects in the country, as you know. This project was referred to us by the Department of Transport, primarily for the reason we stated: to ensure that we could arrange the financing and make sure that Ms. Gascon has everything she needs to be able to build the project on time and on budget.

We do an—

Carol Anstey: Those conversations were all internal. You didn't have any independent oversight.

You mentioned earlier how some of these projects are coming in through meetings with premiers. Is that correct?

Dawn Farrell: The projects come in a variety of ways. They come from the government. They come from the provinces. They come from proponents. They come from first nations.

Carol Anstey: I want to pause on that point for a second.

The Prime Minister was in Newfoundland and Labrador, and he met with the then Liberal premier, John Hogan. In a public press conference, he talked about two specific projects: the Bay du Nord project and the Churchill Falls project. He described them both as nation-building projects. Afterwards, on September 11, the then Liberal premier, John Hogan, was interviewed about those meetings, and he was very confident that those two projects were going to end up on the list.

If we fast-forward through a provincial election, there is now a new premier, and the projects are nowhere to be found. Newfoundland and Labrador was left out in the cold.

Wouldn't that all prove a certain political nature to who gets picked to be on this list?

Dawn Farrell: The projects come into our office. We do an evaluation—initially a desktop evaluation—of all the different attributes of the projects. As well, we have meetings with the different project proponents. We have the ability to recommend to the Prime Minister the projects we think are ready for referral and the projects on which there may be additional work to do.

As far as I'm concerned in terms of the projects that eventually get referred to us, they do meet the standard that I would believe makes sense for either major projects that should be referred or projects of national interest. There are many projects that are still being evaluated by our office and that will be announced as we go ahead.

Currently—

Carol Anstey: Are there any from Newfoundland and Labrador that are being considered right now?

Dawn Farrell: Yes. Absolutely.

Carol Anstey: Can you provide us with a list that shows the ones that are currently being reviewed, particularly in Newfoundland and Labrador? Can you provide us with some documentation to back that up?

Dawn Farrell: I don't know. The projects are currently being evaluated. I would have to take it under advisement as to whether we would provide you with the projects that are currently under evaluation. I can tell you that currently under evaluation are a number of projects from across Canada that are either infrastructure or major projects that add value to our trade. We're evaluating them within strategies and within all of the criteria under the Building Canada Act.

• (1200)

Carol Anstey: I think that the committee would have a vested interest in seeing some of these projects that are being considered. If you could provide us with a list, we would all really appreciate that.

I recently had a meeting with the Port of Corner Brook when I was in my riding for a constituency week. They have a very strong business case to advance their port, but they're concerned that this project in Montreal might actually hurt them in terms of their ability to obtain financing and move their project forward. What's your response to that?

Dawn Farrell: Are you talking about the Contrecoeur project?

Carol Anstey: Yes.

Dawn Farrell: Again, if you look at individual projects that we're working on right now, you see they're fairly advanced projects, and there are already very strong business cases that those projects will benefit Canada.

When you step back from it, there are about 500 projects in the system right now. We've had 11 referred to us. There are also 400 projects that are in various government departments or with the provinces. They are not stopping as a result of the Major Projects Office. Our job is to advance the projects that come to us and, as we do our work, to also share that work so that other projects can move along as well.

Not every project in Canada will come through the Major Projects Office.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Farrell.

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

Wade Grant (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank everybody for attending today.

I would like to start by saying that I am from the other coast, Vancouver, right by the city of Tsawwassen, in Delta, where another major expansion is being proposed—Roberts Bank Terminal 2.

Before I became a member of Parliament here, I was part of a number of meetings with IAAC and the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority. One of the major issues that we needed to deal with was integration and consultation with indigenous communities. There were over 40 that had to be consulted with in the expansion of RBT2.

I know there are not as many on this one, but I just wanted to ask what consultation was done, how many groups...and what did you hear back? How are you integrating that into this proposal?

I'll ask IAAC, and then also the port as well.

Patricia Brady: The port might have better numbers on the total number of nations that were consulted, but certainly that would have been part of the environmental assessment that was completed in 2021. The conclusion of that was that there weren't going to be significant adverse effects and environmental effects of the project, taking into account mitigation measures that were established through conditions.

Those mitigation measures include requirements to continue working with first nations, including on the compensation plan, which I understand the port has done.

I'll turn it over to the port to provide a bit more detail on the numbers.

Julie Gascon: The Port of Montreal has a long-standing relationship with the first nations. There are three major first nations in our surrounding....

We had over 80 meetings with the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke on the Contrecoeur project in the last few years, and certainly many meetings in the last year alone. What I can tell you is that from the first nations perspective, we've received their support on the project, including recently from the Council of Kahnawà:ke. They're working with us. They're part of the fabric of everything we do in terms of our consultation, also in terms of their interest in and their benefit from the project.

We're keeping them apprised of all of our work.

Wade Grant: One of the major issues for RBT2 was, of course, habitat restoration or habitat mitigation. You're talking about this with respect to the fish at stake here.

I just wanted to know if there are any examples that can be pointed to where this sort of movement of fish to another area has been successful, because that's something we wanted to ensure when we were talking about sturgeon and salmon at the mouth of the Fraser River.

Are there any examples of where this has been a successful reintegration?

• (1205)

Julie Gascon: Are you talking about all of the species for which we have compensation, or just for the copper redhorse?

Wade Grant: No, I'm just asking if there is another example from this country or around the world where this has happened before—where a project was deemed necessary, and then fish were found and moved to a new habitat.

Julie Gascon: I wouldn't be able to tell you, sir, but maybe Nathalee—

Nathalee Loubier: Maybe you could talk about the fish habitat at les Îles de Boucherville. That's a big one.

Julie Gascon: Oh, yes. One of the big works that we did was in 2012. We constructed 27.7 hectares of fish habitat in what we call les Îles de Boucherville, which are owned, of course, by the Crown and are kept natural. This habitat is working really well.

In the case of the copper redhorse, we had some follow-up that we needed to provide to the environmental department to see whether or not the fish were using this habitat for feeding, and it was seen.

The last time we did this review—the submission was in 2019—it was demonstrated that the habitat was working well.

That was one example for the port of Montreal, where we built 27.7 hectares of habitat for the fish.

Wade Grant: I want to follow up with respect to your answer on indigenous compensation, transfer of indigenous knowledge and their being able to practise their cultures. Is this something that has been taken into account with respect to approval of this project?

Julie Gascon: Absolutely. I'll pass this to my colleague Julien, who has worked very closely with the first nations.

Julien Baudry: Our responsibility goes beyond the project.

We do have an ongoing relationship with first nations to be part of the truth and reconciliation effort in this country, so we are using the cruise industry and our own spaces to promote this truth and reconciliation and the indigenous culture.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Grant.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Baudry and Ms. Gascon.

[English]

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

David Bexte: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses. I appreciate all of you for being here today online and in person.

I want to follow up with the Port of Montreal on one question, about financing. If the MPO didn't exist, would the project have been funded?

Julie Gascon: At this particular moment, as you may be aware, there were several contributions that were already announced. The Province of Quebec is putting \$130 million into the project. The federal government has announced, through the national trade corridors fund, \$150 million.

The project has two phases, what we call the in-water phase and the land phase. For the in-water phase, we started on October 9, and the financing is close to being completely done. On the land side, what remains to be done is a negotiation with the terminal operator that we'll be operating in, so this is why it's hard to answer those questions.

David Bexte: Well, it is and it isn't. It's not a hypothetical question, because this project has been going long before the MPO existed, and it had to have some surety of funding. If that was enough surety to progress the project, it basically had to be all there.

I wanted to establish a baseline, so we could see the impact of the MPO and what the influence is there.

Julie Gascon: The impact of the MPO has been very important for the project, because it put us in touch with all of the various... Mrs. Farrell explained it really well. For example, there's the

Canada Infrastructure Bank, the resources of the Port of Montreal and what they can bring to the table, and building a financial structure that will allow the port to deliver this major infrastructure while continuing its operation.

David Bexte: Okay. Thank you.

Does that include private equity?

Julie Gascon: That includes the Canada Infrastructure Bank, and, if you think about the Port of Montreal as the proponent of the project, our own investment into the project. The Port of Montreal is an autonomous—

David Bexte: Is that yes, there will be private equity?

Julie Gascon: Yes, we would be considered private equity in this particular case.

David Bexte: Okay. Thank you.

Who referred the port project...? It's the other way around: Who notified you that the port project had been referred to the MPO?

Julie Gascon: In our discussion with Transport Canada, with the various players at work—

• (1210)

David Bexte: With Transport Canada?

Julie Gascon: —we were referred to the MPO, and the MPO has graciously worked with us.

David Bexte: The MPO has told us that Transport notified the MPO that they were going to refer it, so I wanted to see if there's continuity.

Ms. Farrell, I'll go back to you. You mentioned in previous testimony and then again today the list of 500 projects being reviewed. I want to dig into this a bit.

We need to make sure that, with all the different avenues into the MPO and at different levels of maturity, we are able to detect favouritism.

I appreciate your grin and the reaction that inherently there is some favouritism, but it needs to be on merit, not based on who you know, what your connections are and how good your communication is.

Could you explain a little more? Will you publish a list of these 500, or will you publish a list of ones that do not proceed past the stage gates?

Dawn Farrell: I apologize; my Internet keeps going in and out. Can you hear me?

David Bexte: Yes, I can hear you.

Dawn Farrell: I think your question was, will we publish the list of the 500, will we publish the list of the assessments, and then will we talk about how we picked our different projects?

We are 70 days old, and we have 30 people now furiously looking at everything to ensure that there isn't favouritism, frankly, because my job as the head of the MPO is to ensure that projects that are of national interest or major projects contribute to the economy, the environment—

David Bexte: Yes, I understand that, but we need to know the process. Transparency is the only way to prevent this from happening.

Dawn Farrell: Yes. Currently, of the 500 projects, we've assessed about 144. We've come down to the current list that has been published. We continue to have a number of projects that we are assessing.

Frankly—and this is the reason I'm smiling—the challenge is that there are way more projects than there are people in the MPO at this point, and our job is to staff up accordingly and be helpful to our proponents. I don't want to have so many projects in the MPO that it's all empty promises and we actually can't come through and fulfill the promise of the MPO.

At this point, as we're assessing projects, we're trying to make sure the intake matches the people we have here. We're trying to staff up in order to be important, and that's what we're doing.

David Bexte: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Farrell.

Thank you, Mr. Bexte.

[*Translation*]

Mr. St-Pierre, you have the floor for five minutes.

Eric St-Pierre (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Good afternoon.

My question is for the officials from the Port of Montreal or the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada.

You provided details of the compensation plan for the copper redhorse. I gather that approximately three hectares of fish habitat would be created to compensate for the loss of habitat at Île aux Bœufs and Îles-de-Boucherville.

Will this compensation plan increase or maintain the copper redhorse population?

Julie Gascon: Excellent question. It leads us to take a closer look at the life of this fish.

At Île aux Bœufs, we'll create 3.29 hectares of fish habitat. The area will double after six years to around 6.2 hectares. In nearly 15 years, it will have quadrupled to 12.6 hectares. You must understand that the St. Lawrence River has 30,000 hectares of fish foraging habitat.

Will the situation of the copper redhorse improve?

In total, the Port of Montreal will invest \$17 million in this species at risk before the Contrecoeur terminal opens in 2030. No one has ever invested that much money in this fish.

You need to understand that this fish lives for around 35 years. It's born in the Chambly basin of the Richelieu River, which doesn't have any speed measures. You must know that Quebec doesn't have any universal speed measures for the protection of its banks.

I don't know whether you're familiar with the Richelieu River. The copper redhorse obviously spawns close to the banks. It's born there and it lives there for two years. After two years, it feeds in the St. Lawrence River. When the little snails are no longer on the

blades of grass, they return to the Richelieu River. They don't reproduce until they're 10 years old.

The foraging habitat for this fish will increase to around 12 hectares. However, for the past 20 years, this fish has been considered a species at risk. Could we all work together, from its birth to its growth and throughout its life, to preserve it?

• (1215)

Eric St-Pierre: I have a follow-up question for you.

Has this compensation plan been reviewed or validated by third parties, and if so, which ones?

Julie Gascon: I'll give the floor to Ms. Loubier, who can tell you about this.

Nathalee Loubier: We already talked about the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, or DFO. The Quebec department of the environment, climate change, wildlife and parks, or MELCCFP, and Environment Canada are also involved.

DFO sought expert advice from the Institut national de la recherche scientifique, or INRS, and Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC.

Eric St-Pierre: In a nutshell, what are these assessments?

Nathalee Loubier: In terms of expert advice, the engineers asked many questions about the work. The INRS was more concerned about the grass-beds. Environment Canada was involved because it owns Île aux Bœufs. Obviously, there were experts from DFO, including fish experts. The MELCCFP was also involved in the project, along with fish experts.

Eric St-Pierre: I'm the member of Parliament for Honoré-Mercier, which includes Anjou and Rivière-des-Prairies. The copper redhorse lives in the Rivières-des-Prairies. Rivières-des-Prairies even has a Parc du Chevalier-Cuivré.

Could you speak about the impact of the Contrecoeur project in my constituency, particularly in Rivière-des-Prairies?

Julien Baudry: There won't be any impact. However, there will be benefits.

It should be noted that other non-port projects will involve work in the copper redhorse foraging habitat and in the development of grass-beds. Given the size of the investment, the knowledge gained could be used to support certain projects in the east end of Montreal. These projects are currently on hold because no solution has yet been found for the copper redhorse.

Eric St-Pierre: I have one last question.

You said that you consulted with the first nations, particularly in Kahnawake. Is the nation in Kahnawake or are other first nations currently concerned about the copper redhorse population affected by this project?

Julie Gascon: We consulted with all the first nations, including in Kahnawake.

Of course, over the past 10 years, the first nations members have asked questions and raised concerns. Our Port of Montreal teams made sure to answer all the questions and record all the concerns. We worked with them to ensure that they were satisfied with our approach.

Eric St-Pierre: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gascon.

Mr. Bonin, you have two and a half minutes.

Patrick Bonin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to talk about the alternate site plans for the compensation work.

When you applied for your permit, you submitted assessments of other possible sites. When did you submit them? Can you submit all the documents required to obtain compensation permits to the committee?

Nathalee Loubier: The first question concerned the four sites—

Patrick Bonin: No. The Species at Risk Act requires the assessment of alternate sites in order to obtain a permit. You said that you submitted alternate sites to Fisheries and Oceans Canada in order to obtain your permit. This is part of your application.

Nathalee Loubier: Yes.

Patrick Bonin: Can you send the committee this permit application, including the presentation of these sites?

Nathalee Loubier: Yes.

Patrick Bonin: Okay.

Section 86 of the Impact Assessment Act states that you must indicate your intention, issue a notice and invite the public to a consultation.

If no notification or alert is sent out, how is the public invited to participate in a consultation? Do you consider a post on a website with I don't know how many thousands of pages and that no one knows about an invitation? How were people invited to participate in a consultation?

[*English*]

Patricia Brady: The requirement in section 86 is that it be posted on the registry. The notification is posted, and it invites public comment. If notices are posted in a certain way under the registry, there is a notification triggered. That's a service that we've only—

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: There is no more interpretation.

Okay, it's working now.

Patricia Brady: If notifications are displayed in a certain section of our website—

Patrick Bonin: In this case, I understand that there was no notification.

How do you consider that the public was invited? How does the Port of Montreal consider that the public was invited if no one was aware of it and if the invitation is on a 10,000-page website?

[*English*]

Bram Sepers: I would just add that the notification system is a relatively new feature coming online in 2024. Prior to that, there weren't notifications.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: I will ask my question again.

The Port of Montreal wanted to be a good corporate citizen and co-operate with the public, but you clearly did not receive any comments. We have just been told that no one was invited and that the notification did not work, which is nothing new.

I therefore repeat my question. Are you prepared to take the time to do things properly and invite people to give you their opinion on an important project?

The Chair: I would ask you to keep your answer brief, please.

Julie Gascon: Thank you, Mr. Bonin.

My colleague explained that we have complied with all legal requirements. We even went beyond the requirements for public consultations. We answered many questions and received comments during the discussion forums.

For our part, the publication is complete.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gascon.

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

[*English*]

Ellis Ross: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You talked about the federal and provincial contributions to finance this project. Was there a plan to borrow private money to finance the rest of this project?

Julie Gascon: Currently, the project is financed as follows: \$130 million comes from the provincial government, and \$150 million comes from the federal government. We know the cost of the in-water work. We have a fixed-priced contract. That work has started. Our preliminary work started on October 9.

Ellis Ross: Excuse me. I don't want to know the cost. I want to know the financing plans for the rest of it.

Julie Gascon: The rest of the financing is what we are in negotiation for now, and that's what we're working on with the Major Projects Office. It involves money from the Port of Montreal, as well as working with the Canada Infrastructure Bank, and working with a financial structure that will allow us to deliver the project on time in 2029.

Ellis Ross: You talked about how old this project is, so there was a financing plan long before the Major Projects Office got involved.

Julie Gascon: In terms of the project itself, my predecessors bought the land in 1980. There were three big phases in terms of how this project was envisioned.

The first time, it was land that was purchased for the existing terminal to be able to expand in Contrecoeur. We worked with them. That was around 2020 or 2019. Unfortunately, they could not come together on a financial approach to expand in Contrecoeur.

In 2022, we launched an international process to see whether or not we could have a partner who would do both the land and the water sides. The result of this international call for offers was that the partners were interested, but they were not interested in doing the water side. It's complex in Canada with the permitting and consultation work. It was not something private partners were interested in. There were over 14 people who came.

Ellis Ross: I understand that, but I'm going to presume, then, that there was a financing plan long before the Major Projects Office got involved.

This project got approved in 2021. There are only outstanding permits from DFO needed—which the Major Projects Office will not help with—but the Major Projects Office will help with financing going forward. That's going to take a number of different forms, depending on the financing solution there.

You've talked a lot about the consultation with first nations. How many impact benefit agreements are signed with treaty first nations and non-treaty first nations in this area?

[Translation]

Julien Baudry: Allow me to intervene. That is an excellent question.

We have not entered into a benefit-sharing agreement with the first nations. That did not prevent them from issuing a favourable opinion on the licence and the project.

[English]

Ellis Ross: You've done consultations, which is technically not following the case law in terms of addressing rights and title, because you don't have an impact benefit agreement. Were there any accommodations made for them, either technical or economic?

• (1225)

[Translation]

Julien Baudry: If I may, I would like to add that several changes were made to the project based on comments received from first nations, as well as during public consultations before the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada.

In short, this project has benefited from the expertise of first nations in developing the project we have today. We have chosen a different approach, but first nations have expressed their support for the project in writing.

[English]

Ellis Ross: Okay. There are no impact benefit agreements.

It wasn't consultation as per the Haida court case of 2004, and there was no accommodation, especially under impact benefit agreements, so this kind of question might be irrelevant, then.

For the Montreal Port Authority, did you represent the Crown in addressing the treaty rights or non-treaty rights in establishing this project?

[Translation]

Julien Baudry: If you'll allow me, I'll provide you with more specific information.

Of course, respect for first nations and their rights is part of the project. As for our status as representatives of the Crown and the impact on the various treaties, I will need to provide you with answers that I don't have at hand at the moment.

[English]

Ellis Ross: Can we have that in a written response, Mr. Chair?

Can we have that as a written response, Mr. Baudry?

[Translation]

Julien Baudry: We will be happy to send you a detailed written response.

[English]

Ellis Ross: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baudry.

I now give the floor to Ms. Miedema.

Shannon Miedema: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I think my questions will be for the port authority.

I'd like to hear a little more about the economics of going through with this project of the expansion at Contrecoeur in terms of trade with other countries.

I wonder when the last economic analysis was done for the financial benefit to the port itself, as well as to the province of Quebec or the region. Can you talk a bit about why this is such an important project?

Julie Gascon: I'll start, and then I'll pivot to my colleague, who has a lot of information on the economic impact assessment and analysis that was done.

This will expand the port of Montreal's capacity by 60%. The port of Montreal is the major gateway for Europe, India and South-east Asia. We deal with 140 different countries. In the current situation and in the geopolitical context that we're living in right now with the United States, as you are well aware, there are a lot of diversification efforts under way.

Part of this analysis is that if only 6%—a small, modest number—of cargo takes a different route and goes not to the U.S. but instead to the 140 countries with whom we have agreements—a lot of them are in Europe, of course—the port of Montreal would be full very quickly. The urgency to build this project has really come to light in the recent geopolitical context. Our government, under Prime Minister Carney, has talked about doubling the amount of non-U.S. exportation, and this would mean a deficit of seven million containers in this country to achieve this target within the next 10 years. This phase of Contrecoeur will add 1,150,000 containers, and for my colleague in Vancouver, I think it will be roughly 2.5 million, so there is still a deficit even after those two major projects go forward.

There's no doubt in my mind that the economic impact will be massive. It will support 400,000 jobs, as well as 10,000 jobs once the terminal is operational. When you're looking at the value, it's the value of the goods in those boxes that is coming in and going out. It's agricultural products. It's medication. It's all of the dialysis equipment that comes from Germany, products that go into our hospitals after coming through the port of Montreal. It's fruits. It's vegetables. It's cars. It's all kinds of different goods that people need every day in their lives, and it's keeping the shelves full in stores.

I'll turn it over to you, Julien, to comment more specifically on the economic impact.

• (1230)

Julien Baudry: Briefly, the first ones that will benefit from the terminal will be the exporters on the south shore of Montreal. There are actually 600 exporters near the port of Montreal and the future terminal. Also, the agricultural companies on the south shore will benefit, because remember that 35% of our volume at the port of Montreal is actually food, and we have a positive trade balance with many countries and areas of the world.

For example, you will not find on this continent a port that has a positive trade balance with Asia, but we do, as 70% of our relationship with Asia at the port of Montreal is exports and 30% is imports. Actually, our first trading partner is India, so we are not only diversifying but also strengthening our trading relationship with Europe and future markets like Africa and Southeast Asia. This project will allow those trade deals to bring some benefit to workers and companies.

Shannon Miedema: If you've had a recent economic impact assessment done, do you have any numbers? Do you have a report that could be submitted to the committee around the economic benefits for Quebec or for the port specifically?

Julien Baudry: Of course. We'll share the summary. The important part is that there will be beneficial impacts not only in Quebec but also in Ontario. Actually, 50% of our volume at the port of Montreal belongs to the Quebec market and 30% belongs to Ontario, but there's also the Prairies and, lastly, the Midwest, but 90% of the economic impact of the port of Montreal is realized in Canada. It creates not only high-paying jobs but also some redundancy and resilience for the supply chain.

We would be more than happy to share that analysis.

Shannon Miedema: What about the port itself? Is it a for-profit entity?

Julie Gascon: The port of Montreal is a federal autonomous agency, which means that we generate revenue to be able to manage our operations, our maintenance and a certain amount of growth. We are a non-profit. We need to submit all of our information, but we are really there to serve Canadians. We need to generate enough revenue to be able to maintain the asset, do growth projects and remain competitive and productive, but everything we do is reinvested into the port.

Shannon Miedema: Wonderful. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Farrell, this project was referred to the MPO by the government a couple of months ago. Since then, you have been assessing whether it should be designated as a project of national interest, but construction is slated to begin.

My question is this: If there is such urgency to designate, then why the delay from the MPO?

Dawn Farrell: The MPO has two functions. A project can be referred—in that case we work on what we call concierge service, either for regulatory or for the financing—or it can be assessed to see if it needs to be a project of national interest and designated.

We do not see the project of Contrecoeur in that second category. Currently, our work with the Port of Montreal is on the financing.

Branden Leslie: They get referred for assistance. You're the concierge. You help them go to each department with their hand out to try to get some money for the project.

What do you actually need to approve, then?

Dawn Farrell: When the projects come in, we assess them against the five criteria under the Building Canada Act. Those criteria are strengthening our autonomy, resilience and security; economic and other benefits; high likelihood of success; advancing the interests of indigenous peoples; and contributing to clean growth and our objectives with climate change.

We look at all of those criteria, and we determine where they are in their development. If you look at Contrecoeur—

Branden Leslie: You analyze all of these things, but if it has nothing to do with the national interest stream, do you have anything to approve? Are you sending anything to cabinet that is a recommendation for this project to have something done with it? If it's not of national interest, would it have something else done with it?

Dawn Farrell: We have two functions. We have the function of working with projects that have been referred to ensure they have all of the things they need, are financed, can continue to be built and can achieve their economic and environmental outcomes.

At the same time, our—

Branden Leslie: I'm unclear on what gap you're actually filling here, though. What role is the MPO playing on projects that are simply referred by the government? You just keep saying that it's a concierge and you're there to help, but what are you actually doing?

Dawn Farrell: Actually, what we're doing is ensuring that projects can be streamlined, get to the finish line, get built and get their financing and their money.

In some cases, projects are of national interest and will need to be designated under the Building Canada Act. So far, there haven't been any of those projects.

• (1235)

Branden Leslie: This seems like the government went after the absolute lowest-hanging fruit. It's a project that is absolutely just ready to go and they said, "Hey, we're here to help. We've put enough hurdles in the way, so we're here to try to fix this."

The government seems to be bypassing the normal intake process and just sending projects directly to you, as they did. The minister has now said that they're thinking we should slow down and stop referring so many projects.

Is your office already swamped by the number of projects that have been hand-picked by this Prime Minister, so that you cannot review projects that are applying to be designated?

Dawn Farrell: Actually, for the projects that have been referred to our office, the proponents are very happy that they are being referred to the office and that we are working with them to help them move their projects along, for sure.

As well, there are a lot of projects that would like to be referred, so we have a team that's very busy ensuring that.... The proponents have to do their own work. They have to do their work on the regulatory, first nations and financing.

These particular projects here are major projects for Canada.

Branden Leslie: Yes, I understand. All projects are major projects, and this is not the national interest project stream.

You were recently in B.C. when the Prime Minister announced a slate of projects being referred to your office—projects not yet approved by you and not approved by the government. You still haven't determined whether or not they meet your criteria, and the government hasn't approved any of these projects.

Did you actually review these projects before the announcement? Did you, in fact, make any recommendations, or did the Prime Minister make recommendations to you in advance?

Dawn Farrell: I did review the projects, and I did make recommendations.

The role of the Major Projects Office is to work on two streams. We work on streams of projects that are referred to us that can be advanced, get going and get building. As well, we work on projects to determine if they should be in the stream of projects of national importance that would be designated.

We have two—

Branden Leslie: There are two possibly going into that stream. Earlier, you mentioned one or two projects of national interest.

Could you identify what those are and why you're putting a cap on one or two of them?

Dawn Farrell: I'm not putting a cap at all on one or two of them. I'm assessing all of them for those criteria. Some projects don't need that because they're far enough advanced. Other projects may need that. We're working on a number of projects to see if there are projects that will fit in that category.

That will happen in the next year or so.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Farrell.

For five minutes the floor is yours, Mr. Fanjoy.

Bruce Fanjoy: Thank you.

This question is for the Port of Montreal.

How is the Major Projects Office making a difference in the progress of the Contrecoeur project? You noted that the land was purchased in 1980, but I sense that there's more momentum at this point. How has the Major Projects Office made a difference?

Julie Gascon: Thank you, Mr. Fanjoy.

Let me just say that I was a public servant my whole life before I joined the port. I was a director general of marine safety and security. As a public servant, I had seven laws to administer and 280 regulation standards. We looked at our hats, at the mandates given to us that enabled us to do things through our laws. Each department does it in this way.

What changed for us with the arrival of Ms. Farrell and her team? Often, when you're looking at it as a department, you're looking at it from a bit of a silo. It is a little bit of a silo. It is difficult to bring all parties together when there is an issue and to task a working group to look at it: How do we undo this? How do we move forward? How do we each advance within our own legislation?

What Ms. Farrell and her team are bringing us is that the project is a priority. When there are issues, we get people together. There is a communications subcommittee. There is a finance subcommittee. There are all kinds of subcommittees in which all the departments are tasked to find solutions. It's not to find just solutions but to find solutions that will allow us to deliver the project on time and on budget, that will provide the best structure for the financing, that will have the least impact on Canadian taxpayers and that will deliver this infrastructure in accordance with the business case, with the best partner possible.

That's what has changed with us. It has changed our lives, the Major Projects Office, because it has brought everybody together and focused. That's why I appreciate being with this project. It's rigorous. It's hard. It's tough. We have tough discussions, but it has changed the way in which we have advanced with this project.

• (1240)

Bruce Fanjoy: Thank you.

Given the importance economically of Contrecoeur, are we satisfied that we can do this while protecting habitats and the environment around the Richelieu River and the St. Lawrence River? If there is anything more that can be done, what might that be?

Julie Gascon: I believe so wholeheartedly. I believe we can do a project of high economic impact while respecting our fiduciary duty as citizens towards the environment. This is a greenfield project, sir. It's electrified. Most of the cargo will move by train. In Montreal it's almost 60% to 65% by truck and 35% to 40% by train. At Contrecoeur, you're flipping it. It's much more by train. It's electrified. It's a terminal that is modern. It's built towards its generation, with the smallest footprint possible that yields the maximum capacity.

We are building a terminal of the future, a green terminal. We've secured our power with hydro. Most of the terminal, if not all of it, will be fully electrified. It is a really great project that can also demonstrate the leadership of Canada in terms of how we're going to build this infrastructure.

The other thing that people don't know is that the port of Montreal is a destination port. When ships come in, they fully discharge and fully reload. Every time you get a train coming in, it's full. Every time the train goes out, it's full. That's why it's such a strong model and platform, yielding the greatest benefits in terms of GHG emissions as well.

Bruce Fanjoy: Thank you. I have no further questions.

The Chair: That's almost an extra minute you're giving us. Wow. That's nice.

[Translation]

Mr. Bonin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Patrick Bonin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to address the representatives of the Montreal Port Authority.

You mention first nations support for the compensation project. Do you have any information about the consultations you conducted with them on this subject and the dates on which they took place?

Do you have a document attesting to the first nations' formal support for this compensation project?

Julien Baudry: We will be happy to provide you with a detailed list of what has been sent to us, including the minutes of all the working sessions.

As my colleague said, the compensation project was the subject of dozens of working sessions with first nations. We will therefore be happy to send you these documents attesting to their support.

Patrick Bonin: When did these consultations take place?

Julien Baudry: They were conducted over the last few months, before we received authorization, of course.

Nathalee Loubier: I would add that consultations on copper red-horse seagrass beds began in 2021, when we received the statement

of decision. Condition 3.21 required us to develop a compensation plan. We can provide you with this information as well.

Patrick Bonin: To my knowledge, a document from Aecon concerning the compensation project was completed in October.

Is that correct?

Nathalee Loubier: Are you talking about the preliminary draft for the design of the facilities?

Patrick Bonin: I thought it was for a compensation project.

Nathalee Loubier: Are you talking about October 2024 or October 2025?

Patrick Bonin: It was in 2025.

Is there an Aecon document on the compensation project?

Nathalee Loubier: Do you have the title of the document? That would help me a little.

Patrick Bonin: I'll check, but don't you have a document from Aecon on the compensation project that was produced in October?

Nathalee Loubier: You said it was in October 2025, but could you tell me which document you are referring to?

Patrick Bonin: This one concerns the compensation project.

Nathalee Loubier: Right now, Aecon is responsible for monitoring the developments, but could you tell me which document you are referring to?

Patrick Bonin: It is the one presenting the compensation project as such.

Nathalee Loubier: Are you talking about the follow-ups that are done every day?

Patrick Bonin: I am referring to the document you obtained before the permit was issued. There is a document from Aecon that was produced in October, but you are telling me that the consultations took place before this document was available.

Julien Baudry: Several documents were produced by Aecon, and some of them were subject to consultation. Of course, some documents were updated beforehand so that we could obtain the necessary authorization from Fisheries and Oceans.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baudry and Mr. Bonin.

[English]

We go now to Mr. Leslie for five minutes.

Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd just like to start with Ms. Farrell again.

Given that we understand today that the Port of Montreal was not expecting this referral—they were told 24 hours in advance—I'm curious, in an effort to be transparent in this new office, as to whether you would be willing to share the communications between the transport department and/or the minister's office and the MPO in the lead-up to that referral, as well as between Fisheries and Oceans Canada and/or ECCC, if they had any involvement prior to this decision to refer this project.

Dawn Farrell: Actually, Jeff, I was just starting at that time, so do you want to take that question?

Branden Leslie: I'm just looking for you to share some documents, if they're available.

Jeff Labonté (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Natural Resources): The assessments of all the projects were done throughout the summer period, and that summer period had a significant number of projects that were being looked at. As the office had reached the point at which the first projects were announced, for obvious reasons there was a lot of attention on a number of projects that were being looked at, and the number of projects greatly exceeded—

Branden Leslie: On providing the communications between your office and the various departments and the minister's office, are you willing to do that for this committee, to be transparent?

Jeff Labonté: There's a working group of teams of people across the federal government, public servants, who did the assessments against the projects, against the five factors.

Branden Leslie: Okay, so I'm going to take that as a no, you do not want to have any clarity—

The Chair: Mr. Leslie, please allow the witness to finish.

Branden Leslie: Okay. Yes or no, will you share those documents?

Jeff Labonté: The projects have been announced. The Prime Minister announced the projects, they were referred, the projects are on the website and all of the information about the projects is on the website.

Branden Leslie: I'm going to cede my time, so that the individual who moved this motion, my colleague from the Bloc Québécois, can take my remaining time.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: Thank you.

May I ask how much time I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have the floor for three minutes.

Before you begin, however, I want to caution you, Mr. Bonin. When you ask a question, give the witnesses a chance to answer. I have been lenient up to now, but I will be stricter in the future, as the interpreters are having difficulty doing their job and I have had to warn everyone more than once.

Thank you, and I now give you the floor.

Patrick Bonin: No problem. I would also ask the witnesses to answer the questions.

As part of the port expansion, 13,000 trees are expected to be cut down and work will be carried out on land contaminated by oil, among other things.

Have you obtained permits from the municipality for the work to be carried out on the contaminated land, and for the felling of trees?

Julien Baudry: Thank you, honourable member.

As government agents in this project, since the work is being carried out at the request of the port authority, and in accordance with the Canadian Constitution, we are not required to seek municipal authorization as we are also on federal land.

Patrick Bonin: So you do not intend to obtain municipal permits for your activities.

Julien Baudry: Like all Canadian port authorities that carry out projects, as agents of the Crown, we are not required to obtain permits. Therefore, we will not have to apply for these municipal authorizations.

Patrick Bonin: All right.

I understand that you do not intend to hold another consultation. Even though you did not receive any comments during the consultation you conducted, you refuse to conduct another one. Is that correct?

Please answer yes or no.

Julien Baudry: There is no reason to hold another consultation when the rules are being followed, honourable member.

Patrick Bonin: All right.

Has your work in the critical habitat of the copper redhorse begun?

Nathalee Loubier: Yes, work has begun. We are starting by building the temporary dock.

Which location are you referring to?

Patrick Bonin: I'm talking about the critical habitat of the copper redhorse.

Nathalee Loubier: Yes, work has quietly begun. Preparatory activities have started. The permit from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans was received in October.

Patrick Bonin: Mr. Chair, given the situation, I would like to submit a motion. I think it is important.

Would you like me to move it now?

• (1250)

The Chair: Go ahead.

Patrick Bonin: I move:

Considering that the “compensatory measures” project will result in the destruction of the essential habitat of the copper redhorse, an endangered species, and that this destruction of essential habitat by the compensation project was never communicated to the public during and after the consultation period;

Considering the appearance of major irregularities or breaches in the consultation process related to the granting of a permit for the “compensatory measures” project by the Port of Montreal in connection with its Contreccœur project.

That the committee demand the suspension of work that could affect the critical habitat of the copper redhorse in order to hold a proper public consultation on the “compensatory measures” project.

Eric St-Pierre: I'm asking for a suspension, because we haven't had a chance to read the motion.

The Chair: You should receive it in a few minutes.

Eric St-Pierre: I'm asking for a suspension to take a look at it.

The Chair: Okay.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1250) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1255)

[*English*]

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Has everybody received the motion?

Go ahead, Mr. St-Pierre.

Eric St-Pierre: Under which standing order does this committee have jurisdiction to issue this motion? I'm reading the last paragraph. It says "the committee demand the suspension of work". Does this committee, and I'm a new MP, have jurisdiction to make such an order and, if so, under which standing order?

The Chair: Are you addressing your question towards the chair, or are you addressing your question towards the MP who brought forward this motion?

[*Translation*]

Eric St-Pierre: I'm asking the member who moved the motion.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bonin.

Patrick Bonin: As the motion states, the committee requests a suspension of work.

The work was authorized by Fisheries and Oceans Canada based on a permit issued under the Species at Risk Act for a species that is not currently listed on the Species at Risk Public Registry. To be valid, a permit must be published in the registry.

Today, I'm hearing that work is being done in the critical habitat of a threatened species, even though the permit hasn't even been published and is therefore not even valid. Furthermore, it would have been Fisheries and Oceans Canada that would have issued this permit, which we don't have access to. I therefore note that there have been no consultations or requests for comments. People haven't been informed about this work, which would destroy part of the critical habitat of the copper redhorse. This is concerning. We're asking for a consultation to be organized. It's not complicated. We're asking that things be done properly, in accordance with legislation and with a proper consultation process.

With this motion, committee members are expressing their concern and stressing the importance of not starting work without proper consultation. Normally, Fisheries and Oceans Canada should study this motion, since the port doesn't want to do it itself. The port could suspend the work and hold a real consultation, since it has noted that no comments have been received and that this is a threatened species whose survival is a cause for concern. Many people can take action, including those at the Port of Montreal and at Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

I'm wondering if, as committee members, we can block the work. However, certain institutions within the government can, and, obviously, the Port of Montreal could as well.

What concerns me is the future of the copper redhorse, an iconic species that is found only in Quebec and is threatened, and the work that is currently being done. The process was flawed and people were not informed. That's what I'm very concerned about.

• (1300)

Eric St-Pierre: Thank you.

I share your concern and thank you for your comments, dear colleague.

My question is more about the process than the content. Can we as a committee act as judges and direct the appropriate authorities to act?

As far as I know, there are no Standing Orders to that effect. If you know of one that gives us that power, it would be appropriate to forward it to us.

Patrick Bonin: Our committee is sovereign. Today, we are requesting that work be suspended. We have the right as members of the committee to make this request. It will then be up to the government authorities to accept it or not.

However, our responsibility as members of the committee is to say that we are concerned about our current findings on the situation of the copper redhorse and the work under way. Therefore, we are asking that work be suspended. Obviously, the appropriate authorities will have to respond to this request.

Eric St-Pierre: Okay.

I'm a new member, so I'm trying to better understand the process and procedures of committees.

I read chapter 20 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. To my knowledge, we don't necessarily have that power. Correct me if that's the case.

Patrick Bonin: Mr. Chair, the committee has the power to request something. If we agree, we can ask for anything. In this case, we are asking for a specific thing, which is to suspend the work, but we aren't the ones who will enforce it. We're concerned, we're saying so, and we're asking for the work to be suspended.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fanjoy.

Bruce Fanjoy: I concur. I don't believe this committee has the authority to stop work on a project that is currently under way.

I'm curious to see where this goes, because, ultimately, what we're looking at is a project that is strategic to Canada's economic future. We are talking about an expansion of the port of Montreal by somewhere between 40% to 60%. I don't know how we diversify our markets internationally without the capacity to ship goods, and this is an example.

You know, land was purchased in 1980, before some people around this table were born, and nothing happened. What we're seeing now is progress. It's progress that will lead to jobs and provide new markets and expanded markets for Canadian businesses that will help to ensure that our economy meets this moment, this challenging moment that all 343 ridings in the country are facing right now.

I think how MPs and committee members choose to vote on this motion, if it is even in order, will tell a tale, so I'd like us to get to that very quickly.

• (1305)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fanjoy.

I think I will pass the mic to the clerk to give us a clear picture on what position this committee has with respect to the motion that is on the table. That will give us a better idea of where to go next.

The floor is yours, Mr. Clerk. Thank you.

The Clerk of the Committee (Leif-Erik Aune): Yes, sir.

I would refer members to Standing Order 108 in the Standing Orders. The committee is empowered to examine and inquire into any matter that is within the committee's mandate or that is referred to it by the House of Commons. It is empowered in that regard to report from time to time as well as to send for persons, papers and records, so it is within the power of the committee to examine this piece of public policy and to make recommendations by reporting to the House.

If the committee were to adopt the motion that it is currently debating, then it would entail a resolution of the committee making a recommendation. The committee would be empowered to report this recommendation to the House of Commons and to request a written government response pursuant to Standing Order 109. The power of the committee to examine, to inquire and to report does not include the power to compel the government to take any particular action.

If there's any additional information that members require regarding administration or procedure, I would be happy to answer them.

Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: Mr. Chair, obviously we can adopt this motion. If the issue isn't resolved on your side, I will tell you that we can indeed adopt it. In fact, the clerk has confirmed this.

My honourable colleague spoke about the economic issues surrounding this project. We completely agree with him that there are currently economic issues. However, the question isn't whether or not there are economic issues. Rather, it's whether we are capable of developing projects in Canada that respect the environment, threatened species or species at risk, and whether we are capable of doing so in the right way. The Standing Committee on Environment

and Sustainable Development isn't ruling on the value of this project. Rather, it is saying that there are red flags and that it wants to ensure that this project is done properly if it goes ahead.

However, there was no consultation. I therefore invite you to support our request for consultation. It should have been done properly, but clearly it wasn't. In fact, the testimony was very clear on that. If the Port of Montreal issued its notice of consultation tomorrow morning, it would be concluded in 30 days.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Bonin, but we can't get into the debate right away, because I have to do something first. I gave you a few seconds to answer, but now you have started a debate.

Before we continue debate on the motion, I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Thank you. You're free to go.

That brings us back to the debate on the motion moved by Mr. Bonin.

I'll let you finish your thought, Mr. Bonin.

Patrick Bonin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will conclude my remarks.

I just wanted to remind you that tomorrow, the Port of Montreal could file a notice of consultation. It would be concluded in 30 days. There are people and specialized groups out there. I'm not telling you for the sake of it, but because it's important to hold this consultation. Independent external experts and certain groups are following the issue, and they're telling us that it makes no sense. They're wondering why it was done this way, given the environmental impacts that could be avoided.

My goal is to avoid these environmental impacts and to have a transparent consultation on a project that has been in the works for a very long time. We were talking about 2012. I don't see why we should accept that the Port of Montreal should be deprived of conducting a proper consultation in 30 days, just to be clear.

If we have the necessary information, if we know that this project won't be rushed unnecessarily and that it will be done by the book, everyone will have a clear conscience. That's what we're asking for.

• (1310)

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any further debate?

[*Translation*]

We'll go to a vote.

[*English*]

(Motion negated)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

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