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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Shannon Miedema (Halifax, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

[*English*]

It's a pleasure to be here with you for meeting number 42 of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. This is a public meeting.

This is a reminder of headset safety for those here in person.

Bill C-241, an act to establish a national strategy respecting flood and drought forecasting, is undergoing clause-by-clause consideration today. I'd like to provide members of the committee with a few comments on how committees proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of a bill. Many of our committee members will be doing this for the first time today, so hopefully this will be helpful to everybody.

This is an examination of all the clauses in the order in which they appear in the bill. I'll call each clause successively, and each clause is subject to debate and to a vote. If there are amendments to the clause in question, I'll recognize the member proposing it, who can explain it. The amendment will then be open for debate. When no further members wish to intervene, the amendment will be voted on.

Amendments will be considered in the order in which they appear in the package each member received from the clerk. Amendments have been given a number in the top right corner to indicate which party submitted them. During debate on an amendment, members are permitted to move subamendments.

In addition to having to be properly drafted in a legal sense, amendments must also be procedurally admissible. The chair may be called upon to rule amendments inadmissible if they go against the principle of the bill or beyond the scope of the bill—both of which were adopted by the House when it agreed to the bill at second reading—or if they offend the financial prerogative of the Crown.

If you wish to eliminate a clause of the bill altogether, the proper course of action is to vote against that clause when the time comes, not to propose an amendment to delete it.

Once every clause has been voted on, the committee will vote on the title and the bill itself, and an order to reprint the bill may be required if amendments are adopted, so that the House has a proper copy for use at report stage.

Finally, the committee will have to order the chair to report the bill to the House. That report contains only the text of any adopted amendments, as well as an indication of any deleted clauses.

I thank the members for their attention and wish everyone a productive clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-241.

Pursuant to Standing Order 75(1), consideration of clause 1, the short title, and of the preamble are postponed.

I am now calling clause 2.

(Clause 2 agreed to)

(On clause 3)

The Chair: We have some proposed amendments to clause 3. Is there a member who would like to move their amendment?

Monsieur St-Pierre, go ahead.

Eric St-Pierre (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Thank you.

I had initially proposed amendment number one in the preamble, I believe, clarifying language of adding territories, but I'd like to withdraw that amendment, please.

• (1105)

The Chair: Monsieur St-Pierre, we've paused the discussion on the preamble. We vote on that at the end. We're actually talking about clause 3 and LIB-3. I think you're saying that you do not wish to move that proposed amendment. Is that correct?

Eric St-Pierre: Just to clarify, is that in clause 3 on line 20?

The Chair: Yes, that's correct.

Eric St-Pierre: Yes, I would like to withdraw this amendment.

A voice: You should just ask him why.

The Chair: Would you like to give the reason you're not moving the amendment, Mr. St-Pierre?

Eric St-Pierre: I had initially proposed this amendment but then realized that it was a bit redundant, because it's also in the Interpretation Act. The Interpretation Act already includes the use of territories, so it was a bit redundant or unnecessary.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Grant.

Wade Grant (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): I would like to move my amendment to clause 3.

I have a couple of amendments in there, but the first one is to paragraph 3(3)(b), which begins with “an assessment of the need for modelling that”. My amendment would strike out “would identify properties and infrastructure at risk from floods” and replace that with:

would support flood and drought forecasting

To the beginning of paragraph (d), it would add:

measures that the Government of Canada may take in response to the assessments referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c), including

That would be followed by “the preparation of a proposal” and so on.

There's also a correction at the end, where it says, “and system based on the federal-provincial distributed model of the National Hydrological Service.” Instead, the last two words should be “Hydrometric Program.”

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Leslie.

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

I have many questions about this one, Mr. Grant.

We've sat here, and we've talked about floods and droughts a lot lately. We just finished a study on extreme weather events. We've recently had the environment commissioner here. I'm curious: If floods and droughts are becoming more serious, why on earth are the Liberals weakening such important language within this bill?

Wade Grant: As currently written, paragraph 3(3)(b) would mean the strategy would have to include an assessment of the need for modelling that would identify properties and infrastructure at risk for floods.

This amendment would change the provision to instead require the strategy to include assessment of the need for modelling more generally that could support effective flood and drought forecasting. This is better aligned with the proposed bill, which intends to enhance coordination.

Branden Leslie: Do you believe that monitoring water levels is the same as flood forecasting? That's ultimately what this will lead to.

Wade Grant: Do I believe it?

Branden Leslie: This is your government, as the parliament secretary, I suppose.

Wade Grant: Monitoring water levels is always important for predictions of flood forecasting and whatnot, including in my area of Vancouver Quadra, at the mouth of Fraser River, where we've seen the fluctuation in the water levels not only on the Fraser River but in the tributaries surrounding there.

Branden Leslie: If the national forecasting service remains only something the government may consider, why do we believe that will actually happen? Why not put stronger language in the bill?

Wade Grant: For me, I think that saying that and making sure that we follow up on that is something that we will continue to do. I believe that we will make concerted efforts to do that, for sure.

Branden Leslie: I appreciate that you hope that they might, but that's why there's different language used in legislation—“shall” or “must” or “may”. It's a very deliberate choice.

Why not just say that the minister must develop a proposal for improved national “flood and drought forecasting”?

Wade Grant: I don't want to be prescriptive always. I think there's always an opening for interpretation, so that's why I feel this is the strongest way to move forward.

Branden Leslie: This is a government member's piece of legislation that has gone through the House of Commons once before, unamended.

I'm curious now. If this legislation is so meaningful and this amendment is so important, what exactly will Canadians see, receive or benefit from that they do not have today through making this alteration with this amendment?

• (1110)

Wade Grant: I think that the purpose of the bill is to provide the most latitude possible for the development of a strategy moving forward.

Branden Leslie: Are officials available to talk about this issue?

The Chair: Yes.

Branden Leslie: Could we have them come to the table?

The Chair: Yes.

Can the witnesses please identify themselves by name and title for the record, when they're ready?

Stephanie Lane (Executive Director, Legislative Governance, Department of the Environment): Hello, Madam Chair.

My name is Stephanie Lane, and I'm the executive director of legislative governance at Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Doris Fortin (Director General, Policy, Planning and Partnerships Directorate, Department of the Environment): Hello.

I'm Doris Fortin, director general of policy, planning and partnerships for the Meteorological Service of Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

Branden Leslie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the officials for being here.

I have a number of questions about this particular amendment.

I'm wondering if you could confirm that the national hydrometric program is primarily a monitoring program, not a flood or drought forecasting service.

Stephanie Lane: The national hydrometric program is indeed a hydrometric monitoring program that's cost-shared between the federal government, provinces and territories. In addition to being responsible for monitoring water levels and flows, it makes data available to Canadians and other users of the data. Also, as part of the Meteorological Service of Canada, the National Hydrological Services have developed modelling capabilities for water levels and flows.

Branden Leslie: Therefore, yes, it's monitoring.

If this amendment is simply pointing to a program that already exists rather than its initial intent in the legislation, why would the committee see this as a serious response to worsening floods and droughts?

Stephanie Lane: I will begin with the answer, and then if my colleague has something to add....

I believe, Madam Chair, that the member is speaking to the amendment proposed to paragraph 3(3)(d), which adds that the strategy must include:

(d) measures that the Government of Canada may take in response to the assessments referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c), including

Then it goes on to say "the preparation of a proposal", and so on. The intention of referring to the previous paragraphs was to reflect that the proposal referred to in paragraph 3(3)(d) would take into account all of the assessments and the analysis that were done as part of the strategy in paragraphs 3(3)(a) to (c), as well as to include a proposal for the establishment of a co-operative forecasting service.

Branden Leslie: Is that the answer?

I'm going to go back to the difference between monitoring water levels and appropriately forecasting flooding. Would you agree that collecting river level data is not the same thing as producing a flood forecast?

Doris Fortin: You are correct. Collecting data is one of the ingredients for doing the flood forecasting.

Branden Leslie: What would the national hydrometric program do today that would qualify as forecasting rather than monitoring?

Doris Fortin: We have modelling that predicts water levels and flows.

Perhaps, if this can be helpful, the reason we are proposing the last correction, as noted by the member previously, is that the national hydrological services, the entity, is not a federal-provincial distributed model. It's a Government of Canada entity. What is federal and provincially distributed is the national hydrometric program. That is what we do in collaboration with provinces and territories.

• (1115)

Branden Leslie: It's in collaboration with.... Does it issue warnings to provinces and territories or Canadians?

Doris Fortin: The responsibility for warning citizens about floods belongs to provinces and territories. The national hydrometric program or the National Hydrological Services do not issue warnings for flooding or droughts.

Branden Leslie: Let's say that we see a river gauge that has the water level rising. What happens? How does that raw measurement get turned into something that those other jurisdictions, which you say are responsible, can actually do something with?

Doris Fortin: The water level data from the gauge is shared with provinces and territories. Either emergency management organizations or flood forecasting agencies at the provincial and territorial level are the ones responsible for taking that data and turning it into a warning or an alert for their constituents.

Branden Leslie: It seems to me that this amendment is being presented as though there's an existing federal program that's going to solve the forecasting gap. You just said it's shared with the provinces. Can you square that circle for me?

Doris Fortin: I think what the text says is that there's a need to prepare a proposal for the establishment of a forecasting service that's based on the co-operative model that already exists in the national hydrometric program.

Branden Leslie: Could you tell me, as the bill originally stated, what new obligations the minister would have and what the amendment would alter? What is the obligation that the minister or the department has after or if this bill is amended via G-1?

Stephanie Lane: The strategy will still need to include the elements in paragraph 3(3)(d), but it also will add that the measures that the strategy must include should also be considered in light of the analysis of the other elements of the strategy. It would also need to take into account the assessment of the need for modelling, as identified in paragraph 3(3)(b), and the benefits of coordination and new investment in paragraph 3(3)(a), as well as the measures that are relevant on the basis of the analysis referred to in the other paragraphs of subclause 3(3).

Branden Leslie: The amendment says, as I asked our parliamentary secretary, that the minister "may take...." Does that mean the minister is permitted to take these measures but is not required to? Is that correct?

Stephanie Lane: The language of the text says that the strategy must include "measures that the Government of Canada may take". The strategy, as framed, would not direct the minister to do certain things or the government to do certain things.

Branden Leslie: The amendment lets the government more or less study and potentially, maybe, take some steps, but it doesn't actually force it to do anything. That's why I said the word "neuter" early on. This really relieves the minister's department and this service of any real obligation. Is that correct?

Stephanie Lane: I would say that the language of paragraph 3(3)(d) ensures that the strategy must include whatever measures are identified in paragraphs 3(3)(a), 3(3)(b) and 3(3)(c).

As noted at various points, responsibility for flood and drought forecasting is shared with provinces and territories and lies principally with provinces and territories. Based on the fact that the government has two years to develop the strategy, I think that using the language of "may" is appropriate, given that it's unclear what the strategy will uncover as it's being developed.

Branden Leslie: Does this legislation—particularly with this amendment, should it be passed—create a single national standard for flood forecasting or drought forecasting, or does it require—as you said, because of the collaboration with provinces—any federal data to be integrated with provincial forecasting?

Stephanie Lane: It requires the strategy to be developed within two years, and the strategy will identify measures.

Branden Leslie: Could you summarize this quickly for me? What is the problem with paragraph 3(3)(d), and what is the amendment solving?

Stephanie Lane: There were two problems.

I think my colleague has identified that the reference to the National Hydrological Services is likely an error, because National Hydrological Services is an entity within the Meteorological Service of Canada, so it's part of a federal department. Where it says “federal-provincial distributed model”, the correct reference to the federal-provincial distributed model would be to the national hydrometric program.

The additional element at the beginning of paragraph 3(3)(d) includes the idea that there are a bunch of assessments and a bunch of analyses that will be undertaken as part of this collaborative development of the national strategy, and that they should be considered when the strategy identifies which measures the Government of Canada should take as a result of the strategy.

• (1120)

Branden Leslie: Will any mayors or farmers or provincial emergency response directors be any further ahead, thanks to this legislation as amended?

Stephanie Lane: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. Can the question be reframed?

Branden Leslie: Canadians are concerned, and I am concerned, because I just had flash flooding in Winkler two days ago, and I had three tornadoes. This issue is live across every one of our regions and very recently has become particularly relevant to my region.

Accurate forecasting for flooding, for droughts and for emergency situations of extreme weather events is very important, and it seems to me that this legislation is a plan to make a plan to come up with a plan in two years. As for any specifics within the legislation, which has already been passed in the House of Commons in a previous Parliament, the government has now decided that, no, we shouldn't take on that onus: We should neuter this relatively benign “plan to make a plan” legislation. I am fairly baffled as to why the government feels it is necessary to neuter this piece of legislation.

My question is this: If you're a mayor in a flood-prone area of my region or across this country, or if you're a farmer who is watching drought or flood forecasting, or if you're a provincial emergency response director, if this legislation becomes law, are you going to be any further ahead in any awareness about future floods or droughts?

Stephanie Lane: The legislation requires that the federal government work with provinces and territories, consult with various parties as identified in the legislation, and develop a strategy within two years.

It is a private member's bill, and as the member for Terrebonne introduced it, I think her intention is for there to be assistance for Canadians with respect to floods and droughts.

The Chair: Mr. Leslie, I think we had the opportunity to speak with the member at a previous committee session to have these questions asked and answered.

Could we be quite tight?

Branden Leslie: What day was that?

The Chair: It was when the member was here. It was last week.

Branden Leslie: It's the amendment that I'm asking about, though.

All of that being said, I'm disappointed that the government is neutering its own private member's bill. I have no idea why it would do that.

I am done with questions for now. Thank you.

The Chair: Is there further debate on the amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Bexte.

David Bexte (Bow River, CPC): Officials are here for more clarity, so I'll continue along the lines of my colleague's questions.

Hydrometric measurement activities happen at a point in time, and that is the present. Converting that measurement into a forecast is projecting into the future, and it's the future that we're concerned about in this exercise. It's what might happen down the road.

Part of my confusion with this amendment is that the whole point of the bill was to develop a strategy and to do something, but the amendment is suggesting that this all becomes optional and that there's no compunction to do anything. It's very difficult federally, as we've said clearly, because there's a lot of provincial jurisdiction here, and we don't want to be compelling other jurisdictions to be doing things. However, we should be able to compel the government to do things. That's the entire point of legislation in our jurisdiction.

We've gone through this bill a lot. We've studied it a number of times, through two different Parliaments, and there has been a lot of great testimony as to the relevance and importance of it. I struggle to understand why we then purposely make optional any of the strategic recommendations that come out of this. Whatever the work is that is to be done, it should be done, and the minister should not have an exit plan pre-built into the legislation. Otherwise, there's no point to the legislation to start with. It would be internally contradictory from the outset.

Does that seem like a logical view to you?

• (1125)

Stephanie Lane: If I may, paragraph 3(3)(d), as introduced, required the government to prepare a proposal for the establishment of a co-operative forecasting service. That was the extent of what paragraph 3(3)(d) required.

What was added in the amendment proposed in G-1 was a reflection that a proposal for the establishment of a forecasting service was just one of the elements and one of the measures that the government may want to include in its strategy. Rather than being exhaustive and being about only this one measure, it includes other elements that weren't previously explicitly required by the strategy.

David Bexte: Are these elements fundamental to the strategy or to the development of the strategy?

Stephanie Lane: Paragraph 3(3)(d) has been crafted to ensure that whatever is identified through the course of the development of the strategy can be included as measures in the final strategy as things the government should do.

Any national or federal strategy cannot compel provincial governments to take specific actions. A national strategy cannot require certain things. What paragraph 3(3)(d) does is ensure that as the analysis and the assessment and the co-operative work are being done to develop the strategy, the measures that need to be in the strategy will also be included as a result.

I would add that after the strategy is developed and tabled in Parliament, there is a requirement for a report that speaks to the effectiveness of the strategy to be tabled in Parliament after five years.

David Bexte: You said you're—

The Chair: Is there further debate on the motion?

David Bexte: I'd like to continue, please.

You said a few times that these should be or must be included in the strategy, yet you're suggesting with this amendment that it all be optional.

Stephanie Lane: The title for subclause 3(3) includes “The strategy must provide for”, and the subclause includes the language of measures. I think the framing of the amendment to paragraph 3(3)(d) was to ensure that it reflected the assessments done in paragraphs 3(3)(a) to 3(3)(c).

David Bexte: That leaves it all optional. It leaves any actions optional.

Stephanie Lane: National strategies cannot necessarily direct government actions.

David Bexte: Okay. I'm done. Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any further debate on the motion?

Mr. Leslie.

Branden Leslie: What's the point of a national strategy, then?

Stephanie Lane: This is a private member's bill that is being introduced—

Branden Leslie: You just said that national strategies don't direct government action, so what's the point of a national strategy?

Stephanie Lane: As I think we discussed in previous appearances, the idea of this national strategy is to catalyze and to bring parties together to develop a national strategy for flood and drought forecasting.

Branden Leslie: Then all of the government's national strategies ultimately may have no bearing on what the government does. Is that...?

You just said that national strategies don't direct government action.

Stephanie Lane: In the way in which the elements of the strategy are included, the strategy must contain certain elements and the government must table the national strategy and report on its effectiveness.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Greaves.

Will Greaves (Victoria, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the officials for sharing some time with us this morning.

To clarify some of the intent behind my colleagues' questions, I'm wondering if you could specify in quite simple terms whether you would agree that the amendments proposed today would allow the government to develop a more comprehensive strategy for flood prevention and drought prevention.

Stephanie Lane: Yes.

Will Greaves: Thank you.

Does this amendment, in your view, give officials like you better tools to do what this legislation is asking you to do?

• (1130)

Doris Fortin: Yes.

As my colleague outlined, as part of the assessments identified in the first three parts of the bill, it's possible that gaps will be identified that need to be addressed that are outside the flood forecasting service as mentioned here.

One example that was already mentioned is interoperability of data. It's entirely possible that in the course of the assessment, we would identify some gaps or challenges across provinces and territories and the federal government that may need to be addressed for this to happen. Broadening the strategy's language in this way will enable us to address some of these potentially fundamental issues that need to be addressed before there's a national flood forecasting capability.

Will Greaves: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Bonin.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin (Repentigny, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Lane, I share my colleague's concerns about what this strategy actually achieves; we've discussed this.

I'd like to understand one thing. In your opinion, from a legal standpoint, does the addition of “may take” make it optional, compared to the wording used initially? Was it certain that a proposal would be prepared?

Is my understanding correct?

Stephanie Lane: Subsection 3(3) and paragraph 3(3)(d) state that the strategy must include measures. However, the use of “may take” reflects the fact that it is not yet known what gaps the strategy will identify. This provides flexibility to include reasonable measures.

Patrick Bonin: Okay. That said, do you agree that the current wording will necessarily lead to the preparation of a proposal to create a national service and system? That's a fact.

By adding the words “may take”, we may be opening the door to other options, but we can no longer be certain that the preparation will take place. Am I correct?

Stephanie Lane: That's correct. If, according to the strategy, it is not necessary to create a proposal, then it will not be included if this wording is used.

Patrick Bonin: In your opinion, is it better to no longer prepare a proposal?

Stephanie Lane: I don't know if you want to include more, but, as I said, this strategy was developed in collaboration with the provinces and territories, and it takes into account feedback from stakeholders and indigenous peoples. Therefore, it's best to leave some flexibility regarding the measures that will be proposed in the strategy.

Patrick Bonin: We are talking about a decentralized federal-provincial model. What I've heard—and I don't necessarily share this opinion—is that everyone who came to testify seemed clear on the fact that the preparation of a proposal followed a decentralized model. However, what you seem to be saying is that, ultimately, as public servants, you aren't sure that this is necessary or important.

Doris Fortin: Allow me to add a comment.

What we're saying is that we don't want to presume the results of the assessment that will be done based on what is described in paragraphs 3(3)(a), 3(3)(b) and 3(3)(c), if I'm not mistaken, and we want to leave the door open to a range of measures that could address the gaps identified through those assessments.

Patrick Bonin: I just want to make sure I understand what you're saying. The bill talks about “the preparation of a proposal for the establishment”. We haven't even reached the establishment itself yet, but simply the preparation of a proposal.

It's hard for me to understand why we wouldn't move forward by preparing a proposal. It seems like such a minimal and watered-down proposal to me. I admit I'm a little surprised this morning.

Doris Fortin: As my colleague mentioned, the idea here is to be more general in order to be able to address the gaps identified. The preparation of a proposal is still recommended, in particular, but, of course, it will move forward only if, according to the strategy, it is determined to be the measure to be implemented.

• (1135)

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Watchorn.

[*Translation*]

Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.): Just to clarify, I believe the goal of the national strategy is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each province and each organization that will participate in the national strategy.

Ms. Fortin, I think what you're saying is that the amendment aims to avoid overlap with what already exists in certain provinces and to make it possible to use the strengths of some provinces to

address the weaknesses of others. That gives you some flexibility to ensure that you don't impose measures that already exist in certain provinces. Am I mistaken?

Doris Fortin: You're right.

It gives us the flexibility to avoid these overlaps and also to support certain provinces that don't have the same opportunities to move toward developing the capacities they currently lack. The goal is to avoid overlaps in areas where there are existing strengths. We have to focus on the strengths of certain provinces and learn from one another, taking into account the strengths that already exist within the system.

Tim Watchorn: Perfect.

In closing, I would like to say that, as a mayor and an engineer, I always liked having access to the most reliable data. I think that even a provincial or municipal organization that has access to federal government resources will have an advantage in terms of its flood or drought forecasts using the current strategy.

That's not a question; it's a comment. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Leslie.

Branden Leslie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Going back to part (a) in amendment G-1, with the shift away from the language of “would identify properties and infrastructure at risk from floods” to “would support flood and drought forecasting”, I understand you want to be more general, but that particular clause seemed to make a lot of sense, whether it be private, municipal, federal or provincial infrastructure that's at risk.

Why take out that language? If you wanted to amend it, why wouldn't the government just add that clause as another one? Why remove something so specific? Why remove “identify properties and infrastructure at risk from floods”?

Stephanie Lane: My colleague may want to add more information, but I think the idea is that “would support flood and drought forecasting” is broader and covers the issue of “identify properties and infrastructure at risk from floods”.

I believe it's this committee that has heard information about the actions that the government is already taking with respect to identifying properties and infrastructure at risk from floods, so this is just to ensure that it captures a broader set of activities.

Branden Leslie: Again, I would go back to why you couldn't just add the language of “would support flood and drought forecasting” to cover it all. If you wanted broadness in the legislation, you could leave the specifics that the member who tabled the bill intended to have in here and add something more general that would allow you to do that.

We have, in fact, recently talked about this. We had the environment commissioner come in and talk about his report. We saw that Public Safety has blown \$11.5 million on stale data that can't be updated on a website that isn't functioning. We have seen what the government's actions are, and they're frankly terrible, so I don't know if we want to go too far down that path.

My colleague asked whether or not this would give more substantive options to the department for measurements and more tools and things like that. My question is this: This legislation, in its original form, without the gutting that the Liberals are doing now, was passed in the House of Commons and died on the Order Paper when the government prorogued 18 months ago or more. If this is going to be so helpful and if it's such a wise idea, the government would have had.... If they had started then, at the time it passed the House, even though it didn't actually become law, and if they thought it was such a good idea, why didn't the minister and the department take action and just undertake to do what's in this bill anyway? The two-year strategy would be almost done by now.

Stephanie Lane: I think that the last time we were here, we provided evidence. Today we're here to speak to the clause-by-clause consideration and the amendments being proposed.

I think the goal of paragraph 3(3)(b) is to provide a broader assessment. Whether or not it could be added to another thing is not a question that I can necessarily answer, but the intent behind it is to ensure that the assessment is aligned with the purposes of the bill and can include the measures that are necessary.

• (1140)

The Chair: Mr. Watchorn.

Tim Watchorn: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think we've gone through this now. I'd like to vote on the amendment, please.

The Chair: Are we prepared to vote on the proposed amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Amendment G-1 carries.

We will move to BQ-1 and Monsieur Bonin.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As my colleague Mr. Watchorn said so well, one of the goals is to avoid overlaps with existing efforts and to recognize what has already been done.

I heard my colleague speak to this need, and I believe this amendment also provides further clarification with a view to respecting jurisdictional boundaries.

The Chair: Could you repeat that, Mr. Bonin?

Patrick Bonin: I think that this amendment complements, among other things, what my colleague said about the need to ensure there is no overlap and to recognize the work of the provinces in a spirit of collaboration.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are you moving BQ-1 now as an amendment?

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: That's exactly what I'm doing, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Do we have debate on the amendment, or are we ready to vote?

Go ahead, Mr. Watchorn.

[*Translation*]

Tim Watchorn: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have read the amendment carefully. Honestly, I don't think it's necessary. Excluding Quebec from the implementation of the national strategy when other provinces have exactly the same expertise runs counter to the purpose of such a strategy.

As I said earlier, the national strategy is a collaborative effort. Some provinces are still using Excel spreadsheets to make flood forecasts, which is unacceptable. By inviting all 13 provinces to the table, we can maximize the expertise of every province and ensure that everyone is pulling in the same direction. I think Mr. Pomeroy put it very well. The 13 flood planning experts have never sat around a table together. That has never happened.

I believe the federal government's resources will assist the 13 flood and drought forecasting systems. I find it hard to imagine excluding Quebec, as a provision in the legislation specifically states that, in order to adopt the national strategy, Quebec must be explicitly consulted. This is very clear in the regulations. So I don't see the point of the amendment as such.

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

Mr. Bonin, you have the floor.

Patrick Bonin: Madam Chair, I appreciate my colleague reviewing the amendment. Obviously, we are working with a legal text.

Mr. Watchorn, if that's what you're concerned about, I can reassure you by clarifying that this amendment in no way talks about excluding Quebec. It simply seeks to clarify that we should not propose measures that would create overlaps. It's not a matter of removing Quebec from the negotiating table. On the contrary, we are saying that plans already exist. That's the idea. Let's make sure we're not duplicating efforts here, as you mentioned; that's important to you.

Perhaps I missed something in our wording, but I don't see how this wording says that Quebec is being removed or excluded from any consultation table or activities. It's a point of clarification. If that's your interpretation, I'd like to understand it because that's not what the amendment says.

Tim Watchorn: That's not what I was saying. What I was saying is that, if Quebec is removed, British Columbia and other provinces that have exactly the same responsibilities as Quebec when it comes to flood planning will have to be removed. That doesn't get us anywhere. What I'm saying is that the protection requested by the amendment is not necessary.

Patrick Bonin: This is an interesting debate, but it still amounts to saying that Quebec must be excluded.

• (1145)

Tim Watchorn: No, that's not it.

Patrick Bonin: That's exactly what you just said. Once again, the amendment calls for the plan to be taken into account. It doesn't say to remove Quebec or exclude it. I don't understand your reluctance. That's not at all what it currently says.

Tim Watchorn: I understood perfectly well. What I'm saying is that, as I understand it, there's no question of removing Quebec from the negotiating table. Rather, the idea is that the protection contemplated by the amendment is already provided for in the bill, notably through the consultation mechanisms. Therefore, the amendment is unnecessary.

Patrick Bonin: We have done some work, after all. Can you tell me exactly where, in the current bill, you see anything that addresses duplication of work and the consideration of the territorial flood protection plan? If there are other provinces, I have no problem adding a reference to Quebec or any other province. I know that Quebec has a flood protection plan, but I don't know if that's the case for all the other provinces. Personally, I haven't seen that anywhere in the bill. There's a reason we worked with our legal experts to include this clarification. It complements what already exists by providing clarity and ensuring that concerns about the duplication of efforts or overlaps are taken into account, in the interest of efficiency within the federal government.

As we know, we are here and we are part of Canada, since we do not have our own country. This is a reality to which we want to contribute, while ensuring that there is no duplication. People don't want us to duplicate efforts and spend money twice for no reason. I think that's an important clarification. There is a plan; it is there, and it must be taken into account.

Tim Watchorn: Indeed, I am very pleased that the province of Quebec is part of Canada. This is something very close to my heart, and I'm glad we're on the same page in this regard; perhaps we are not.

As for the strategy, I will defer to the experts. However, as I understand it, the bill contains an explicit requirement for the department to consult representatives of provincial governments and first nations communities before finalizing the strategy. Since the duty to consult is already provided for in the bill, the amendment is not necessary.

Patrick Bonin: There is still a difference. When we talk about consultation, for example, we can consult a first nation and still impose something on it. Consultation does not mean that we're required to take something into account or to ensure that there is no duplication of work.

I understand that the bill already provides for consultations, but our point goes beyond that: We are saying that consultations must be taken into account and duplication of effort must be avoided. I can consult you and not take your opinion into account. What we're trying to clarify is precisely the importance of taking things into account, ensuring that public funds are spent wisely and avoiding any duplication of work.

Eric St-Pierre: Madam Chair, it's always a pleasure to hold a debate in French. I am very grateful to my Bloc Québécois colleague for his remarks, as well as to my colleague from the riding of Les Pays-d'en-Haut for his comments.

I move that we proceed to a vote on this amendment.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. St-Pierre.

[*English*]

We can take it to a vote.

(Amendment negatived [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Clause 3 as amended agreed to)

(On clause 4)

The Chair: We'll now move to clause 4. We have LIB-4 as a proposed amendment for clause 4.

Go ahead, Monsieur St-Pierre.

Eric St-Pierre: Can you provide clarity on this clause and which amendment we're at, exactly?

The Chair: The reference number is 13856211. This is yours, Monsieur St-Pierre.

It is that Bill C-241, in clause 4, be amended by replacing line 24 on page 3 with the following:

ment of Canada website within 10 business days after the day on

The word "business" was added, instead of it just being "10 days".

Eric St-Pierre: Yes. Thank you.

This amendment is just trying to be specific. I was referring to "days", and I thought "business days" would be a little more appropriate. I know the Interpretation Act covers Sundays, but it doesn't necessarily consider Saturdays. I thought it would be a bit more precise to say "business days". Should this fall a few days before Christmas, we know, with holidays, that it might be challenging to get that in time, so I just want to be very specific in terms of the days.

I know it's a very minor amendment, but I thought I would be specific on that.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. St-Pierre.

[*English*]

All those in favour of amendment LIB-4, please indicate.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Clause 4 as amended agreed to)

(On clause 5)

The Chair: For clause 5, we have amendment LIB-5.

Eric St-Pierre: Madam Chair, this is also with reference to business days, I believe. Is this reference number 13856212?

The Chair: That's correct.

Eric St-Pierre: The rationale would be similar to the one I used previously.

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur St-Pierre.

All those in favour of LIB-5, please indicate.

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Clause 5 as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Now we move to the short title, clause 1. Shall clause 1 carry?

(Clause 1 agreed to)

The Chair: Now we're on to the preamble. We have LIB-1 and LIB-2 for the preamble.

Go ahead, Monsieur St-Pierre.

Eric St-Pierre: Thank you for giving me the moment.

I previously withdrew my amendment that was not on the preamble. I would also like to withdraw my amendment that is on the preamble. This is a request to withdraw.

The Chair: You do not wish to move LIB-1. Is that correct? Okay.

I think LIB-2 is different, is it not? It's also in the preamble, but it's different wording with "the United States".

Monsieur St-Pierre, what about LIB-2?

Eric St-Pierre: I'm happy to speak to this.

I think the original wording mentioned just "the United States". I thought it would be a little clearer if we included "the United States

of America" in full. In other legislation, such as CETA—the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement—that legislation could refer to the European Union as just "the EU", but it would refer to the full pronunciation of "the European Union", so I thought it would be a little clearer to pronounce "United States of America".

Again, it's a very minor amendment. I don't think it's a big deal, but I go back to my lawyer days, when I was always double-checking every "i" in contracts. I'd just like to add the words "of America".

The Chair: Thank you for your diligence, Mr. St-Pierre.

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Shall the preamble as amended carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill as amended carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the chair report the bill as amended to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the committee order a reprint of the bill as amended for the use of the House at report stage?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Thank you very much. We are now adjourned.

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