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Chair: Mr. Kody Blois



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• (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 43rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

I'll start with a few reminders.

This meeting is in hybrid format. Our debate will be broadcast on the House of Commons' website. For your information, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

[*English*]

Colleagues, we are here. I don't think this is going to take very long. I expect that it won't.

There are a couple of things that I need to start with.

Don't start with me, Mr. Perron, with those signals over there.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I have a couple of things. All of you have budgets. These are budgets prepared by the clerk. They are for the food inflation study and for the Ukraine goods remission order, which was two meetings. I need a motion to have those adopted. This is administrative, but I would move that we make that happen, or I would ask that someone in this group do it.

Okay, I saw Mr. Steinley, seconded by Mr. MacGregor, and I don't think we're going to have any issue.

All in favour?

(Motion agree to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues.

Mr. Lehoux, I know you have a very quick point on the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and a request, so why don't you ask your question? We're going to get a quick response so that it's on the record, and then we'll move on.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Was the letter inviting the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to appear before the committee sent? If so, have we received a response?

[*English*]

The Chair: Just for the sake of efficiency, I'm going to respond in English.

Yes, the letter has been sent. The clerk has made sure that it's gone out. However, we don't know exactly what time the committees are going to sit in the new year. The minister is in receipt of this letter, and I think we're waiting to see exactly when the committees are going to sit, but there is an open invitation for the minister to come in 2023.

I'll let my clerk add anything additional if she feels it is necessary.

• (1635)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Josée Harrison): That's a pretty complete answer. As soon as I get the committee calendar for the new year, I will forward that to his office and await a response.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I hope our committee will be the first one he attends.

[*English*]

The Chair: Great.

Colleagues, we are going to move to the bill that is before us today.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, November 2, 2022, the committee will commence clause-by-clause consideration of Bill S-227, an act to establish Food Day in Canada.

I would like to provide the members of the committee with some reminders on how we will proceed with clause-by-clause study.

Madam Clerk, I don't think there were any prepared amendments.

The Clerk: It's actually in your notes.

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

No amendments were submitted for the study of this bill.

If any amendments are proposed during today's meeting, they have to be submitted in writing to the clerk of the committee.

[English]

During debate on an amendment, members are permitted to move subamendments. These subamendments must also be submitted in writing.

[Translation]

Once every clause has been voted on, the committee will vote on the short title, the preamble, 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 the report stage.

[English]

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

Thank you. I was able to work on my French. Thank you for that.

We also have with us today, to answer any questions on the bill, Sophie Beecher, director general, sustainable development policy directorate, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Welcome, and thank you for your work.

I don't know if there are any amendments that are being proposed or if any further discussion is required.

Unless I am wrong, Madam Clerk, I think I can move that pursuant to Standing Order 75(1), consideration of clause 1, the short title, and of the preamble be postponed.

The chair calls clause 2. Shall clause 2 carry?

(Clause 2 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall the short title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the preamble carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: This is wonderful, colleagues.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Shall the bill...? I'm sorry. There are no amendments.

Shall the chair report the bill back to the House?

Some hon. members: You need to ask, "Shall the bill carry?"

The Chair: My apologies. There are a lot of yeses here.

Shall the bill carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the chair report the bill back to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That is all we need, right, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes.

The Chair: Is there anything else here?

The Clerk: No.

The Chair: The condolence letter, colleagues, is all done. It's going to go out. It's very standard fare, obviously, but if you trust us, that will be going out before Christmas.

I think you should have received a subcommittee letter about travel. If this is something we want to do in the new year, we'll talk with our party leads in January about it, so I'll leave it there.

Monsieur Perron, is it on this point or not?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): No.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. I'll come to you in a second.

The Clerk: It's just that the deadline is February 8.

The Chair: February 8 is the deadline, colleagues, so if we want to arrange for committee travel, we have to get something in to the liaison committee before February 8. I will leave it in the capable hands of the room here to decide, in the lead-up to February, if we'd like to make a submission and where we might like to go on the basis of our study.

I don't think there is anything else. I know Monsieur Perron has a question and a comment on how we're going to proceed on the Ukraine goods remission order, so I'll turn the floor to him.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: In the agenda we got, Mr. Chair, there is no mention of any discussion about the study we did on importing products, such as chicken, from Ukraine. Maybe I misunderstood, but it seems to me that, in our informal discussions, we said we were going to discuss that today and decide what to do next.

[English]

The Chair: I'm glad you raised this point. You raised it just after we had finished the last meeting.

What I've heard from the folks who sit on this committee is that we might want to ask the analysts to prepare a "what we heard" report, something we could consider in January. Then we can have that discussion about what you want me to report back to the House.

If we want to get into strong recommendations or something of that nature, I think it would be more appropriate to tackle that in January, in our first meeting when we're back. I think it would be the best to actually have the analysts prepare a summary of what we heard in those two meetings and then proceed in that fashion.

According to the conversations I've had with my colleagues in the House who sit on this committee, I think that's the best way to proceed, but I'm happy to hear what you have to say, Monsieur Perron. We had that conversation, too, but I'll turn it over to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Okay. That's fine if we're going to produce a real report, but it has to happen soon.

My understanding during our informal discussions was that we could also send an informal letter that would cover, in general terms, what we heard. However, if we want to make official recommendations, I'm not opposed to that.

I believe my colleague, Mr. Lehoux, wants to comment on that too.

• (1640)

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Lehoux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I would like to comment on that.

We can wait until the analysts propose recommendations, but we're looking at a *fait accompli*. A decision has been made.

What I did in my office was draft a letter in both languages. I'd like us to write to both the Minister of Finance, Ms. Freeland, and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Ms. Bibeau, about the fact that export certificates for Ukrainian products were issued the day after we finished our study. Rather than use some choice words, I'll just say that came as a big surprise. Maybe I'm just too new to House committees, but I think the purpose of this kind of committee is to gather information and take all the factors into consideration.

The letter we wrote contains some recommendations, although they're not major because this is a *fait accompli*. Export certificates have already been issued by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. I'm going to table the letter anyway, and I hope it will be forwarded to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food as soon as possible.

I realize this can also be done when we come back at the end of January, but we really need to work on this right away when it's fresh in everyone's mind. We heard from witnesses at the end of November, which was less than two weeks ago.

I can provide copies of the letter to the clerk. I don't know if you want to take a look at it and talk about it, but the committee should express its point of view to both ministers.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will go to Mr. Drouin, but let me comment, Mr. Lehoux, on the best course of action.

You, of course, as a member of Parliament, can choose to send that letter to our requisite ministers at any time, and either publish that publicly or write to them. Indeed, you can ask any one of these members across the table to add their signature to the said letter.

I think it's most appropriate for this committee to allow the analysts to do their work. We come back in January. Of course, we can't table anything in the House. The House just adjourned this afternoon, so there will be no reporting back to the House of what this committee might think is a consensus.

I think we should leave it until January to decide whether we want to table a "what we heard" report or have more stringent recommendations. That's ultimately a debate that will take an hour or two, perhaps.

What you propose, you can do individually as a member. You can, in fact, ask other members to do the same with you.

Mr. Drouin, perhaps you had the same thought. I'll go to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): I appreciate my colleague's efforts, but it's not up to a parliamentary committee to approve or reject imports and exports. It's not up to the Standing Committee International Trade or to our committee. The government is the one that makes those decisions, but we can say what we think about some issues.

I have tremendous respect for Mr. Lehoux. He wrote a letter, but it hasn't been tabled. Members of my party are opposed to the letter being sent on behalf of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. If he wants to send the letter signed by other members, he is free to do so. If he thinks this is an issue we need to decide on quickly, he can do so, but it would typically be the analysts writing the letter so that it's not partisan.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think that's the best course of action.

Monsieur Perron, I see your hand.

Mr. Lehoux, I would suggest that you can certainly table it with us. I think we'd still need to go through our analysts, and we'll come back and have the proper debate on January 30, assuming that our meeting day continues to be on a Monday. We can then decide where we want to go as a committee in terms of consensus.

You're right about the rapid nature. If you want to table that or make sure it is sent to the ministers, you can do so today using your parliamentary privilege.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Chair, you summed up what I was going to say.

I hope the committee members will take the time to read the proposed letter. We can also suggest changes. Another option would be to include it in what we give the analysts. I think the message would carry more weight if it came from the committee.

I agree with the fundamentals of what Mr. Lehoux says in his letter. It can be finessed to keep everyone happy, but the message has to be sent. Whether we send it now or in January won't really change anything given that the decision was made while we were working on this issue.

I think it's important for members to express their disappointment and frustration about their work not being taken seriously even though they know they can't make all the decisions and have no power over some things. I think the work we do here deserves at least some consideration. We saw the cost of that earlier: it took some time. I think Mr. Lehoux's message is a pretty important one.

I personally have submitted ideas to the clerk and I have copies here if anyone wants to see them. I may not have to submit them today, especially if we are asking the analysts to come up with proposals. Either way, I shared my ideas about what we should take into account based on what we heard in committee, and I think it's receivable. I've already submitted everything to the clerk. I would like committee members to consider my proposal and the underlying message. I'm sure we can find a way to agree on what message to send. After all, we're a consensus-based committee, and the message always has more of an impact when everyone is behind it. Now, committee members are free to decide if my idea is a good one or not.

• (1645)

[*English*]

The Chair: Colleagues, I'll go to Mr. Drouin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin: With all due respect for my colleague, I have to say that the problem stems from the fact that we haven't given our analysts any instructions yet. Here we are with a letter and some recommendations written by two of our colleagues. If we're talking about recommendations, that means a report, so the process is completely different because we have to analyze the recommendations. Plus, the committee hasn't adopted a motion to send a letter to the minister. It's a procedural issue. The problem is that no motion has been adopted.

Unless they want to discuss it for two hours, I suggest that my two colleagues do what they have to do if they want to send it before December 31. I respect them. They have a job to do, and I respect that.

We've just now received the documents. We can't make decisions that fast. It's a process thing.

If this is still a concern in January, we can look at the situation then.

That said, if Mr. Lehoux wants to send his letter before Christmas, I can't stop him.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will go to Mr. Lehoux, but what I would suggest on this is somewhat along the lines of what Mr. Drouin has suggested, which is that this is coming a little bit late in the session.

As the chair, I certainly respect your sense of duty in raising this issue. As I have already noted, you can do so today with the click of a button by sending that to our ministers and making sure that is well heeded and well heard, but as it relates to the committee itself, I would respectfully suggest that this committee follow the advice of Mr. Drouin and actually come back in January to study this issue.

I think we should give the direction to our analysts to prepare largely a summary of what we've heard, and then, if we feel it necessary to put some prescriptive recommendations or harder language around that, let's do that in January. Let's do that when we come back, when we've had the time to digest both your letters and whatever the analysts will prepare in terms of a summary.

Mr. Lehoux, you want to make a quick point.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With all due respect for my colleague, Mr. Drouin, and all partisanship aside, I'd also like us to recognize and respect this committee's work.

I am here as a member, yes, but I also represent the ag industry, which is clearly the target here. We've heard some very clear testimony, including from the Department of Finance, about how there's been no analysis of the consequences that the government's decision could have.

I certainly understand how the committee works. However, I want the committee to know that I think the way this file was handled is a bit strange. We took the time to bring witnesses in and listen to them, and other people should have done the same.

None of that will prevent me from sending the letter. I'm very aware of that. However, when you read it, Mr. Drouin, you'll see that there's nothing particularly partisan in it.

• (1650)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lehoux.

Certainly part of the dynamic of where we are at today is the actual motion that was passed, which was from Mr. Barlow originally. It was not really prescriptive of what the committee was to do after the two meetings.

Obviously we're now starting to come to framing what we should do. With your request, what the clerk is trying to get clarification on is if we are instructing the analysts to go away and prepare a letter, a summary of what we heard. Then, when we come back in January, we either can take that summary and choose to put in more language if we want to report back to the House to say, "here's what we heard" and ask the government to consider what the stakeholders have told us, or we can choose to include more prescriptive recommendations, which this committee is going to have to agree on.

I really don't think we're going to get to that point here today. I would ask for this committee's direction to tell the analysts to prepare that letter for our consideration for the first meeting when we're back in January. We will tackle it at that time.

Is that a pathway, colleagues, that we can agree on? Yes? Okay.

Other than that, I don't have any other business, colleagues. I would like, with your blessing, to wish you all a merry Christmas,

happy holidays and a happy and prosperous new year. We'll see you back in action in 2023.

Okay. That's wonderful. Enjoy your Christmas. Merry Christmas.

The meeting is adjourned.

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