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• (1645)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Good afternoon, colleagues. We're ready to roll. The sound checks have been done for those who—

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, can we clarify whether the minister is able to stay? It's 4:45 now, so we've lost 15 minutes. Is he able to stay for those 15 minutes?

The Chair: He's nodding yes.

The sound checks have been done. Everything is good.

For the benefit of the interpreters, I say to the witnesses that we have to be careful about noise levels that could harm the interpreters' hearing, so please do not hit the stem of your microphone. When you are not speaking, please turn off your mic. If you're not using your earpiece, please put the earpiece on that round sticker, which looks like a coaster, in front of you.

We're very pleased today to welcome the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

I believe, Minister, you have a 10-minute opening statement. Is that correct? The floor is yours, and we look forward to hearing what you have to say.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Honourable colleagues, thank you for the invitation to discuss the boreal caribou situation in Quebec.

Boreal caribou are an indicator species for the overall health of the boreal forest. Their decline is considered to be a “canary in the coal mine”, an indication that the boreal forest ecosystem is degrading. It has long been understood that this ecosystem is important not only to the health of caribou but to the health of our air, our water, our climate and our economy.

Quebec and Canada's natural abundance is deeply rooted in our culture and is part of our folklore. We all enjoy the free benefits and services it provides. Every day, these services include clean air, moderation during heat waves, filtering our water, commonly known as blue gold in Quebec, and carbon capture. Of course, it also supports economies such as lumber, pulp and paper, biomass and so on. However, these numerous services and benefits cannot be

taken for granted. It is our collective responsibility to safeguard the health of our ecosystems, since we continue to benefit from all the abundance and opportunities that nature has to offer.

As you know, Canada hosted the world in Montreal in December 2022, at the United Nations Conference on Biodiversity, COP15. Thanks to the leadership provided by Canada and its allies, a new Global Framework for Biodiversity was adopted. It's worth mentioning that the Quebec government endorsed it and pledged to contribute to the global goals of protecting at least 30% of land and oceans by 2030 and curbing the decline of biodiversity.

We often congratulate Quebec on its environmental and social leadership, which includes carbon pricing—an essential policy for any climate plan—and for stimulating innovation in a green economy, transport electrification, day care and many others. Unfortunately, some of these successes are overshadowed by a long-standing failure. It was in response to that failure that the federal government began the process of developing a protection order to conserve the habitat of three caribou herds in Quebec whose recovery is facing imminent threats.

• (1650)

[English]

Boreal caribou were listed as a threatened species under the Species at Risk Act in 2003. Caribou population trends indicate that the species is declining across Canada. In Quebec, for example, the majority of 10 populations are in decline. In 2023 the Quebec government estimated that the provincial population is fewer than 7,400 individuals, a marked decrease over the past 10 years. Two of those populations, Val d'Or and Charlevoix, are now maintained in year-round pens, with populations of nine and 39 caribou respectively.

The population in Pipmuacan declined by 24% between 2012 and 2020. Without urgent action, there is a high risk that all these populations will no longer exist in the wild and that without an adequate plan they are fated to stay in pens for the rest of their lives. That is not acceptable.

[Translation]

We've been negotiating with the Government of Quebec since 2016. We offered to share the costs of recovering and protecting caribou habitat, while advancing conservation agreements with other provinces and territories across the country.

In 2022, we thought we had a resolution: a joint letter and a clear commitment from the Government of Quebec to table a caribou recovery strategy by June 2023. That would include how we're going to protect at least 65% of the caribou habitat. Seven years after we began our deliberations and in parallel with the findings of the Commission indépendante sur les caribous forestiers et montagnards, which confirms that this species is in decline in Quebec, the provincial government must do more, as soon as possible, to protect and restore this species' habitat.

After a decision by the Governor in Council last year to favour a collaborative approach—which we have always prioritized—we awaited the Quebec government's strategy. Unfortunately, it never materialized. In response to numerous requests, my department conducted a scientific and fact-based assessment of the imminent threats to Quebec's boreal caribou ranges. This rigorous assessment is based on the best available data and information and clearly demonstrates that Quebec's boreal caribou populations are facing multiple imminent threats.

Based on this assessment, on May 10, 2024, I issued the opinion that boreal caribou face imminent threats to their recovery. Under the Species at Risk Act, I was therefore legally required to recommend to the Governor in Council an emergency order to ensure the protection of the species. On June 19, 2024, Canada announced that it was proceeding with the development of a targeted emergency order to protect the habitat of the three most endangered boreal caribou populations in Quebec.

Our government has taken a reasonable and balanced approach to this issue. This approach aims to protect the best available habitat for caribou while minimizing the socio-economic impact. Our government is not considering this emergency order lightly, just as I'm sure the decision was not taken lightly by the previous Conservative government in 2013 to implement an emergency order in the Prairies for the greater sage grouse.

Tools for caribou survival and recovery success are shared by federal, provincial and territorial governments and must include indigenous communities, municipalities, industry, unions and civil society. This cannot be successful without the province being a willing partner, as it has primary responsibility for wildlife management and many key tools.

While we have invited the Government of Quebec to participate in the consultations, the province has thus far declined to do so. What's more, it has not provided meaningful data to support the socio-economic analysis. Throughout, we have been open with the Government of Quebec to try and find a collaborative solution. Personally, I am still hopeful that we will be able to find a balanced approach, together with the Government of Quebec, which has the most flexible regulatory and legislative tool box for an approach to caribou.

On April 30, 2024, Quebec proposed a series of limited, local measures for three pilot projects, two that pertain to boreal caribou. However, the proposed measures are not clearly defined, are subject to consultations, and have no timelines for implementation. If Quebec takes sufficient measures, the implementation of the federal order may not be necessary. However, given the threat to the cari-

bou, if the Government of Quebec does not take an adequate approach, then we have a legal and moral responsibility to intervene.

I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I would like to point out that the minister is accompanied by two officials from his department: Tara Shannon, assistant deputy minister, biodiversity and Canadian wildlife service, as well as Derek Hermanutz, director general, economic analysis branch.

We will now move on to questions and comments, starting with Mr. Martel.

• (1655)

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

Minister, are you aware that your order will create a social crisis and that you will be killing jobs?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As I said in my remarks, the approach we took is similar to the one taken by the Conservative government in 2013 for an emergency order.

Mr. Richard Martel: Minister, how many jobs will your order kill?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As I was trying to say while answering your question, we have just completed consultations with all stakeholders on socio-economic issues and, obviously, on the issue of caribou protection. We'll analyze—

The Chair: Mr. Martel, would you like to comment?

Mr. Richard Martel: Yes. I asked for an answer to my question: I want to know how many jobs his order could kill.

The Chair: Very well. The minister heard the question. I would ask that he be given the opportunity to answer it.

Minister, please go ahead.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're at the analysis stage. Over the next few weeks, we will analyze all the briefs and testimony that were submitted during the consultations in order to draft the order, which has not yet been done. That will take place over the next few weeks.

You're asking me to answer a question while we're still developing the order.

Mr. Richard Martel: Minister, you are supposed to know how many jobs your order will cost. Your department has done the analysis. According to your department, at least 1,400 jobs will be lost, and about \$900 million in economic spinoffs, all told. What do you have to say about that? We're talking about at least 1,400 jobs disappearing as a result of your order.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As you know, that analysis is based on preliminary data, since the final order has not yet been adopted. Those are estimates, which could vary a great deal depending on the final order.

Mr. Richard Martel: Minister, what are you going to tell people? Some 1,400 jobs will be lost. What are you going to tell these people, who have families, who have houses in the communities and who are going to lose their jobs? What will they do afterwards? Moreover, it will place communities at risk. What are you going to tell them?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You may know that I come from a small town in Quebec called La Tuque. It's a town that has long depended on the forest for its livelihood. There's a pulp and paper mill and sawmills around town. I understand that reality very well. It astounds me somewhat that your party has no understanding of the balance between the state of the forest and the state of an industry like forestry. It's because we haven't taken care of our forests that, in my town of La Tuque, there are only a few hundred mill jobs left, whereas not so long ago there were thousands.

Mr. Richard Martel: Minister—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Why is that? It's because the forest is deteriorating.

Mr. Richard Martel: Minister, I've met with workers, I've met with companies. They are extremely worried. They don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. Those are their jobs. They're happy in their community. They bought houses. They don't know if they'll have to move. They don't know what they're going to do. I want to know if you have a plan for these workers, because if your order is tabled, jobs will be lost.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I've met with workers too. I've met with unions. I was in La Tuque two weeks ago. I was in Lac-Saint-Jean last year. I went to Chibougamau. I sat down with these people. I've met with companies as well. One thing could prevent the implementation of the federal order: that the Government of Quebec table what it has committed to tabling. If that happens—because that's all I'm asking—there won't be a federal order.

Mr. Richard Martel: Minister, I don't know why you're always picking on the Government of Quebec.

We are talking about the Government of Canada. What have the Liberals done so far, since 2015? What have they done for the forestry industry, for the forestry sector? What have they done? The softwood lumber agreement still isn't settled, and we talk about it year after year. I've been here for six years, and we're constantly talking about the softwood lumber agreement. What have you done for workers and forestry companies so far to promote their prosperity? What have you done for them?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair, I thought I was coming to testify on the caribou issue. I think we're getting a little off topic. If my colleague wants data on the—

• (1700)

Mr. Richard Martel: I'm talking about workers.

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Martel.

Please continue, Mr. Guilbeault.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: If Mr. Martel wants information about what other departments have done for the forestry sector, we can certainly provide that information to the committee. I'm the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. I'm not the minister re-

sponsible for innovation, science, industry, or economic development.

The Chair: There have indeed been grants. For example, in my riding, FPIInnovations—which does research on the industry, on new forest products, and so on—recently received a grant.

Go ahead, Mr. Martel.

Mr. Richard Martel: Minister, your order will have serious repercussions. Workers are worried.

What will I say—or what will you say—to Éric, Jean-Marc, Mathieu, Lise, the Girard family and the Tremblay family, who work in the forestry sector? What will you tell them if they lose their jobs because of your order? What are you going to tell them?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You probably know that all the experts, the unions, the indigenous peoples, the environmental groups, therefore the workers themselves, say that the future of their sector is linked to the health of the forest.

You and your colleagues in the Conservative Party are the only ones who do not seem to understand that. Everybody else understands it. We cannot have sustainable forestry if the state of our forests continues to deteriorate. You're the only ones who don't understand that.

Mr. Richard Martel: Minister, what are we going to do about the lost jobs, which will number at least 1,400? What are we going to do with those workers? Are human beings being taken into account? The mayor of Sacré-Coeur says that her community will become a ghost town. Did you meet with her? What can you tell her?

The Chair: Minister, I allowed a few extra seconds, but the time is up. Your answer will have to be brief.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: There were a lot of questions there.

The Chair: Yes, you may have the opportunity—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Are we looking at socio-economic impacts? The answer is yes, of course.

The Chair: Very well, thank you.

It's now Mr. Longfield's turn. I believe he is online.

[English]

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I'm going to ask my questions in English.

[Translation]

You can answer in French if you like.

[English]

I know this is a Quebec issue, but it's also a national issue and an international issue.

In your opening statement, you opened with our international agreements that have been signed, and the sustainable development goals are some of those agreements that we signed in 2015 with 193 different countries. Given your legal obligations under the Species at Risk Act, it wasn't your decision, was it, to propose the emergency order?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you for the question, Mr. Longfield.

The way the Species at Risk Act works is that if the experts from Environment and Climate Change Canada come to the conclusion that a province is not doing enough work to protect the habitat of a species that is endangered. Once this determination has been made, I have a legal obligation to make a recommendation to cabinet for an emergency order. Then cabinet can decide whether or not they want to move ahead with it.

Last year, in 2023, I made a similar recommendation to cabinet, and at that time cabinet asked me if I could try to negotiate with the Government of Quebec, which we've tried to do for over a year. Unfortunately, those discussions and those negotiations were unsuccessful, which is why I had to go back to cabinet to ask again for an emergency order, which was granted this time.

It's a cabinet decision. It's not an environment minister decision. It's a cabinet decision.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

Just so I'm clear, if Quebec had taken sufficient measures, you wouldn't have to be asking for this measure to be taken.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you. I will answer in French, because this is an important question.

I remain convinced that we can come to an agreement if the Government of Quebec is prepared to do its part. In late 2022, it made a commitment to us in an open letter, a commitment to present a plan for the recovery of the caribou. That plan has been pending since 2016, by the way. We were told that by June 2023, a plan would be presented on how to protect at least 65% of habitat. That was stated by the Government of Quebec. It is now September 2024, and we still have not received that plan.

If the Government of Quebec decides to go ahead with the plan, as it has promised to do, I would be pleased to go back to the Governor in Council to inform it that we no longer need the emergency order.

• (1705)

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you. That was the next question on my mind.

It's a temporary order. It's in place only for as long as it needs to be in place, but we do have legal commitments that we have to uphold.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You are right.

Why do I say I am confident we will be able to come to an understanding with Quebec? It is because we succeeded in coming to an understanding with Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia on the caribou issue. I therefore do not see why, if we succeeded in agreeing with all those provinces, it would be impossible to find common ground with the government of Quebec.

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: It isn't a matter of politics, then. It's a matter of legalities, from my understanding.

You're nodding in agreement.

As we look at sustainable development goals, I believe SDG 15 is on this one—living beings on land—but sustainable development goals also include economic sustainability and environmental sustainability and social sustainability, including jobs and the support of transition, so that all of the sustainable goals line up with the three pillars of sustainability, which 193 countries have agreed to.

It seems to me that this aspect is not as much of the conversation as it potentially should be: When the countries got together at the United Nations, 193 signed on to how we as a planet are going to approach sustainability, and the caribou fall into this discussion, but so do the workers.

Could you expand on that just a bit for the committee, please?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Yes, absolutely, and we publish an annual report on how we're moving forward on the implementation of our sustainable development goals in Canada.

What you said was reinforced by the Kunming-Montreal agreement on biodiversity in 2022, when 193 countries and, as I said in my introductory remarks, the Government of Quebec agreed together that in order for sectors like forestry and others to be sustainable, we need to protect at least 30% of our lands and oceans by 2030. That's something you've heard workers—union representatives—say here. They understand that the future of the sector is not based on short-term profits; it's based on long-term sustainability of the forest so that there's long-term sustainability of the forestry sector.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: We'll go to Madam Pausé.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): I cede my time to my colleague, Mario Simard.

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

Thank you for being here, Minister. You know, forestry is a chain: If one link in the chain gets cut, there's a negative impact on the entire forestry industry. When I analyze the data presented to me, including the report coming from your department, I see a disproportionate impact on the forestry sector.

You must take economic conditions into account. For the last four years, the forestry sector has had to fight forest fires—which led to a considerable shortfall for people in the sector—epidemics, infestations by the spruce budworm, a profound lack of financial support from the federal government and disproportionate tariffs. You have to put it all together and, if you go ahead with the order, I guarantee you will throw Quebec's forestry sector into complete chaos. I say that because the majority of small devitalized communities in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and Côte-Nord basically live off the forest.

In the report you tabled, the order directly threatens 1,400 jobs. If we also include indirect and induced jobs, I am sincerely telling you it will be a catastrophe. I understand that you want to put pressure on Quebec. I agree with you; a way to protect the caribou must be found. However, if you go ahead, I guarantee you will throw a considerable number of communities in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean into chaos. You will starve them out. I do not say that lightly. You will starve them out, and I am not sure you will succeed in saving the caribou.

In the forestry sector, we hear from big game biologists who do a very good job defending the caribou. However, we also have to look at the entire ecosystem. If we take forestry companies out of the forest, there will be no more forest management. Our forests will therefore be less resilient: more prone to fires and insect epidemics. Your thought process must include that as well.

I know you could say Quebec is slow to act. However, I think the best solution before us is to step back. It may also be to engage in a conversation with Quebec and different stakeholders to find a solution that will both save the caribou and, above all, save those jobs.

Since I became an MP in 2019, I've never seen your government do anything positive for the forest industry. If I could convey the testimony I've heard from all the players in the forestry sector, it would be a heartfelt plea.

What I am asking you today is to be aware of this. I fully understand your commitment, which is laudable, but I think the negative impacts are much more significant than the positive ones.

• (1710)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you for the question, but I am not sure it was a question. Thank you for your comments.

You talked about my commitment. You understand it is a legal requirement I fulfill as Minister of the Environment. I don't decide whether to issue an order when I get up in the morning, depending on what side of the bed I woke up on. It does not work that way. I am legally required to make this recommendation to cabinet. Afterwards, cabinet decides on next steps. In this case, cabinet decided we had to move forward. The decision was not taken lightly.

You probably know that last year, we signed a comprehensive nature conservancy agreement with British Columbia. It included protection for several species. The federal government invested nearly \$500 million, and the province invested about the same amount. We do not ask provinces to shoulder the burden of meeting species conservation targets without offering support through different types of programs. Some of them could in fact pertain to forestry workers.

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Guilbeault, you are legally required to act. We are also required to achieve the greenhouse gas emissions targets we set for ourselves.

And yet, I see a million inconsistencies. You shelled out \$34 billion to buy a pipeline, but your most ambitious plan for the energy transition cost only \$40 billion. So, on the one hand, a single oil and gas project cost \$34 billion. On the other, the most ambitious project in your department's history to fight climate change and make the energy transition cost \$40 billion. That is appallingly in-

consistent, but I know that you can live with it, because in politics, we sometimes have to compromise.

Today, I am asking you to compromise so that plenty of small communities in Quebec—including La Tuque, where you're from—can keep living off the forestry sector, keep using wood to build low carbon residential units and keep replacing high carbon footprint products through the bioeconomy.

If you go forward, you threaten it all. According to the very conservative analysis you provided—which is not an insult—the impact of the order will leave 55 businesses out in the cold. Those 55 businesses are, for the most part, in small devitalized communities. I understand you are required to issue this order, but I think the government is not even close to a compromise. The best decision you could make is to wait, listen more to Quebec and try to find a compromise together.

The Chair: Mr. Simard, your time is up.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: May I answer?

Mr. Mario Simard: May he answer quickly? He is a minister.

The Chair: I understand, but he will be able to answer at some other moment.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

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

Minister, thank you for being with us today for this important study.

This is the environment committee, so I will talk about the environment. You talked about a lot of important things during your opening remarks, such as biodiversity and climate change. I have before me a non-exhaustive list describing your government's record on those matters.

Under the Liberal government, Canada has the worst record for reducing greenhouse gases among G7 member countries. Among all G20 members, Canada is the one that funds the oil and gas industry the most with public money. When the United Nations asked their member states to tax excessive oil and gas sector profits, lobbyists from that sector went to the finance minister's office, and you backed down during the last budget.

We still do not have a greenhouse gas emissions cap for the oil and gas sector. The commissioner of the environment and sustainable development sounded the alarm about the fact that we cannot trust your plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There are so many loopholes in it for big corporations that companies like Suncor pay a fourteenth of the carbon price than that paid by the average worker or average family.

Finally, as my colleague said, your government paid \$34 billion to buy a pipeline. That pipeline was so useless, even the private sector didn't want to take the risk of buying and expanding it.

We want to save the boreal caribou, but if we save them while the planet burns up and the forest around them burns down, what will we have accomplished?

• (1715)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you for the question.

First, with all due respect, several things you said were incorrect. Between 2019 and 2022, we had the best record for greenhouse gas reductions among all G7 countries. We are the only G20 country that eliminated subsidies for fossil fuels. All G20 countries committed to doing so in Pittsburgh in 2009, but no other country did it. We committed to going further by ending public funding of the oil industry through government corporations, such as Export and Development Canada or the Business Development Bank of Canada. No other G20 country committed to doing so.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: That commitment has yet to be fulfilled.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: We said we would do it this year. It would've been faster if we had been able to keep working with you. It will take a little more time, but we are the only G20 country that committed to it.

As for our plan, the Canadian Climate Institute, an independent organization, highlighted that at the rate things are going, we will achieve our interim objective by 2026. That is a first in the history of the country. The last time greenhouse gas emissions were this low in Canada, O. J. Simpson was being tried and the iPhone had been invented, but was not yet on the market. That means our emissions haven't been this low for 25 years.

Of course, we have to work on conservation. That is why, for instance, when it comes to marine and ocean conservation, we went from 1% in 2015 to 16%. We are on track to reach 30% by 2030. When it comes to land conservation, we are at about 15%. I am the first to recognize we must do more.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: You did more by offering the biggest subsidy ever granted to an oil and gas company and used taxpayer money to buy the Trans Mountain pipeline for \$34 billion. The tax credit you give for carbon capture, an unproven technology, is also a huge subsidy. So, when you say you eliminated all subsidies to oil and gas companies, that is not true. You continue to do it, indirectly or directly, by giving the industry appalling loopholes for the carbon tax and by failing to set an emissions cap, which we are still desperately waiting for. We are now in 2024 and the Liberals have been in power since 2015.

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice, we are supposed to be talking about caribou today.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Well, I like to talk about the forest, and when it burns down, there is a connection.

The Chair: Fine, but let's come back to the forest.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Let's come back to the forest.

Minister, the government of Quebec is dragging its feet. The caribou, which we really don't want to see disappear, is at risk. Isn't the fact you may ultimately be forced to impose an order a sign of failure regarding your ability to come to an agreement with the government of Quebec?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As I was saying earlier, we succeeded in coming to an agreement with several provincial governments on the caribou issue. I still hope we will be able to come to an agreement. Some talk about the order as though it were radical, or something like that. You probably heard about Mr. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent, a full professor in animal ecology at the University of Quebec in Rimouski. He said that under the glass dome, the order looks more like a compromise than a radical protection strategy. Also, despite the amount of evidence the scientific community broadly agrees on, many stakeholders invest significant effort in blowing a wind of disinformation and denial over science in the media. It contributes to the social polarization we see on the issue.

If more people tried to find a solution, and fewer people tried to fan the flames of disinformation and fear campaigns, we would probably make more progress.

The Chair: There are 45 seconds left.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I am sensitive to the heartfelt outcry from local communities, the forest industry and unionized workers, as well as to the fact we had to come to a decree to preserve a threatened species. If the boreal caribou disappears, we won't be able to bring it back. We are not in *Jurassic Park*.

What consultations did you hold with indigenous communities? For them, the caribou is an important symbol, as well as a significant part of their identity and way of life.

• (1720)

The Chair: There are 15 seconds left.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: We don't have a lot of time left, but I could inform the committee of the number of meetings we held and the number of briefs tabled by stakeholders in the forestry, mining and tourism sectors, by municipalities, by workers and by first nations. We met with hundreds of people.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are moving on to the second round.

Mr. Paul-Hus, you have the floor.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hello, Minister.

I also greet the other two witnesses.

Minister, you said earlier that people describe your order as radical. We are the ones who clearly stated that the threat of your order was radical, because there is no balance in the proposed approach. You decided to impose an order that will imperil dozens of businesses and thousands of jobs.

I would like to know what discussions you had with the leader of the Bloc Québécois, Mr. Blanchet, on the caribou file. We know that there was a very good relationship between your two parties.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: First, I profoundly disagree with the way you characterized the order. It is no more radical than the one the Conservative Party, under Stephen Harper, issued in 2013 for another species. It is the same process.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Your approach is radical, but I want to know what discussions you had with Mr. Blanchet.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I think what I am about to say will make many people smile: If my approach is radical, that means the Conservative Party of Canada is radical when it comes to the environment. I am not sure we want to go there.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I'm speaking about the relationship with Mr. Blanchet. What about the caribou protection order did you discuss with him?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I had a discussion with the Bloc Québécois leader in June, if my memory serves me. It was a discussion over the telephone lasting a few minutes.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Did you negotiate an agreement this summer?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: No.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: How was the letter signed by members of your party and the Bloc Québécois? How did a joint letter to the committee come to be signed?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Pardon me?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I can answer that.

Mr. Mario Simard: It's because you didn't respond.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I responded.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: There were negotiations over the summer.

The Chair: Only one person may speak at a time. I think the question was asked.

Minister, we're listening.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Actually, I'm not sure I understand the question.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I spent a long time talking about caribou. We were working on it. Meetings were requested. The Conservative Party wanted to organize meetings. The Bloc Québécois wasn't answering. At one point, Liberal and Bloc MPs sent a letter to the committee asking for a meeting.

What negotiations led to that letter?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You asked what negotiations I held with the Bloc Québécois leader. This was my answer: I took part in

no such negotiations. I had a discussion with the BQ leader, who asked me for clarification when the order was announced in June. I didn't talk about this issue with the BQ leader in July. I didn't talk to him about it in August either.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Minister, we've been clear about the order for over a year and a half. We said that it was a radical approach. The BQ was not in the picture. It started to pressure you this summer, after the holidays.

The Bloc decided not to support our confidence motion. Do you now believe that there were negotiations with you? It's because one of the Bloc's conditions, among others, is to issue the order. Was a request made to your office to issue the order?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I'll say it again: If this is a radical order, the order the Conservatives passed in 2013 should also be considered radical. We've taken the same approach.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: We're going in circles, Minister. That's fine.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: If you have questions for the Bloc, I invite you to put them to the Bloc.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: That's all right. Now—

Mr. Mario Simard: I can answer—

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Simard, please, I have the floor. Thank you. If you want—

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Simard, you don't have the floor. We'll continue with questions from Mr. Paul-Hus and answers from the minister, for now. We may discuss other issues at the break.

I don't know where we were. Is it the minister who's answering questions? Where are we?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair, I was trying to respond to the question about whether I entered into negotiations with the BQ leader on this matter. My answer was no, and it won't change. No, I didn't negotiate with the BQ leader on this matter.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Perfect, thank you.

Earlier, in the answers you gave to other colleagues present, you mentioned, initially, that you had no reason to be concerned, that you weren't worried about the economic impact. Later, you said that you were taking the impacts into account, but you clearly stated that it wasn't your problem, because you're the Department of the Environment and Climate Change and it's the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry who deals with economic impacts.

• (1725)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: That's not at all what I said. I would still—

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: That's what you said. We'll check the record, Minister.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Absolutely. With pleasure.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Now, I want to know something.

When you presented your protection order proposal to cabinet, did your colleagues at Innovation, Science and Industry and Finance ask about the financial impact of this order? It seems to be coming from you, but you mentioned earlier that cabinet had to approve it. However, if cabinet approved it, ministers representing economic sectors must have questioned its impact. If they didn't ask any questions, there's a serious problem within cabinet, no?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: No, not at all. Everything you've just said, or almost everything, is false.

First, I didn't say that I wasn't concerned about the socio-economic impacts. I stated that we did a socio-economic analysis, and that we were going to continue to do a socio-economic analysis. I said that I wasn't the minister responsible for innovation and economic development. If you want information on subsidies provided by this department, no doubt we can provide you with that information.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: When you presented the order, Minister—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Paul-Hus, if you let me, I could answer your question.

Obviously, I cannot reveal what we discussed in cabinet. As you probably know, those discussions are secret. However, a socio-economic analysis of the potential impacts was presented during those discussions.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

Mrs. Chatel, you have the floor.

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

Minister, thank you for coming today.

The committee heard extensive testimony, and it's true that many concerns were raised. However, workers were really sounding the alarm about the state of the boreal forest. Workers are thinking about their jobs now, but also about the future of employment, especially in rural regions. I know this because, in my riding, we have rural communities and forestry industries. There is real concern by workers but also industry to ensure that the forest is healthy.

We're talking a lot about caribou, but could you clarify something? What do you mean when you say it's a canary in a coal mine? What does that mean for the state of the boreal forest?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You're correct, I had several in-person discussions, for example, with the workers in Chibougamau. More recently, I also held virtual discussions. Unlike the Conservative Party of Canada, those people understand that the future of their jobs and the sector depend on the sustainability of the forest. They also understand that one can't happen without the other.

Caribou are a kind of barometer species, if you will. If this species is doing well, we can assume that those ecosystems are doing well. Of course, studies are needed to be sure.

It's worth pointing out—and I think this will partially answer what Mr. Simard was saying earlier—that we've already succeeded in restoring the caribou population in Canada, thanks to agreements with the provinces and aboriginal peoples. It can be done, but everyone has to sit down at the table and want to find a solution.

Right now, a lot of people are at the table, but the Quebec government isn't. All I'm asking is that the Quebec government sit down at the table with us and all the other stakeholders to find a solution.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: All stakeholders, be it the forest industry, workers or environmental groups, are crying out for us to sit down at the table to find solutions. There are solutions, and workers have proposed some of them. They all agree that the boreal forest needs love right now.

Can you give a brief update on the status of these consultations and tell us about the socio-economic considerations set out in the order? We've talked about them, and you told us you'd listened to the stakeholders.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I'll let Mr. Hermanutz or Ms. Shannon give you more details on the socio-economic aspects, but I can give you some numbers on the consultations.

Of the people who took part in the consultations, over 400 were from the forest industry and unions, some 60 were from the mining industry or were mining workers, 30 were from the tourism sector, 26 represented various municipalities, and 105 came from other sectors in the regions. In addition, 200 first nations people and 59 environmental or expert groups were consulted. In fact, we can provide you with a list of the representatives from the various municipalities, regional county municipalities, companies, associations and unions who met with us. I should add that, at the request of two indigenous communities, the consultation period was extended by one month. We held extensive consultations.

Your colleague from the Bloc Québécois told us that the solution might be to wait before tabling the order, but we've been waiting for eight years. At what point do we say to ourselves that that's not responsible, that someone at the table isn't serious? As I just said, we've been waiting eight years. You've heard several experts say that the order isn't radical, but rather a compromise. Some even think it's long overdue. It's not as if we didn't give the Quebec government a chance to sit down at the table and propose solutions. We've done so on several occasions, but it hasn't done so until now, unfortunately.

● (1730)

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: What are the next steps after the consultations? You said that the process leading to the order had not yet been finalized.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: That's right. We have to analyze all the testimony and briefs submitted as part of the consultations. Then, experts at the department will draft the order, which will be presented to the Governor in Council.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Pauzé for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Indeed, we consider it to be a radical order and we're saying that it may not be balanced, because Mr. Branchaud, who testified before the committee on this issue in August, said that it takes 200 individuals for there to be a chance of survival, whereas you want to put in place an order for only nine individuals.

That said, I'd like to ask a question about something else: mining. An article in *Le Devoir*, which I have here, talks about Probe Gold's Novador project in Abitibi-Temiscamingue. To support this project, the government is reportedly prepared to exclude the area in question to allow Probe Gold to set up operations there. As reported in *Le Devoir* on September 13, the company acknowledges that the project will involve numerous activities in nature, including disturbing or destroying certain parts of that environment, such as diverting waterways such as rivers, or the loss of wetlands. We would add that the entire industrial complex will be located in the centre of the critical habitat of the Val-d'Or's caribou population, based on research by your department.

Yes, there will be an environmental assessment, but the fact remains that the government could authorize this project, regardless of the conclusions of that assessment, "if public interest justifies that impact", as the article reports. It seems to me that we have a double standard when it comes to gold mines and the forestry sector. First of all, gold is not my cup of tea. We're going to allow this company to profoundly disrupt the caribou population in this region by excluding this area from the application of the order. Why?

The Chair: Minister, there are 30 seconds remaining.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: First, since you quoted Mr. Branchaud to me, let me quote what he said to this committee: "The emergency order proposed by the Canadian government is justified and measured". That's what he thinks of the order. I don't have the article you're referring to in front of me, but we'll certainly be able to provide an answer on the subject.

However, as you know, we have a very rigorous impact assessment process. When we passed the old Bill C-69, we decided to politicize impact assessments and leave them to the experts. I've listened to the experts at the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada every time they've made a recommendation to me, following numerous consultations and studies. If they make a positive recommendation, I follow it. When they make a negative recommendation, I listen to them too. I listen to them in both cases.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boulerice.

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

Minister, I'm going to come back to the fact that this has been dragging on for eight years. I was a little surprised to hear my Bloc

Québécois colleagues say that we might have to wait a little longer. According to your department, how much longer can we wait?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: The emergency order is a way for us to say that we can't wait any longer and that measures must be put in place, measures that have been promised many times and still haven't been put in place. Some haven't even been announced, since what Quebec presented to us was clearly inadequate. I don't want to repeat what several experts have told you, since you've heard them.

• (1735)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: What are the next steps and what's the timing of those steps?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As I explained to your colleague, Ms. Chatel, we have to compile and assess all the input we collect during the consultations and draft the order. There is no order yet. It has to be drafted and approved by the Governor in Council. It's going to take a few months to work through the whole process. I don't have an exact timeline.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: We know that one factor that disrupts the boreal caribou is the increasing number of roads. More roads means easier access for predators. People from the Conservative Party have said that wolves must be killed to save the boreal caribou.

Do you think that's a solution worth considering?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You probably know that Quebec has 500,000 kilometres of forest roads. The earth's circumference is about 20,000 kilometres. We think that could certainly be part of the action plan. Some of those roads could be closed and reforested. We're obviously not going to close all roads. Some are used for recreational and tourism purposes, and we understand that. There will have to be an assessment, but does Quebec really need 500,000 kilometres of forest roads?

The Conservative Party's proposed solution, eliminating predators, is not a viable or desirable solution.

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice, you have time for a brief 10-second comment.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: No need. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You're welcome.

Mr. Martel.

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

Minister, you may have noticed that I get quite emotional when I'm talking about workers. That's because I've met them. I've been to their community and I've seen the distress in their eyes. These people love the forest; they love their work. At the moment, they're in extreme distress because they don't know what's going to happen. Have you met with the mayor of Sacré-Coeur?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I've met with workers a number of times. Not long ago, I met with union representatives from a number of companies and different segments of the forestry sector, but I haven't met with the mayor.

Mr. Richard Martel: I'm a local guy. The forestry sector is a big deal for the regions.

The mayor said something that I find extremely important. If you impose the order, Sacré-Coeur will become a ghost town. She was distraught; she never thought something like this could happen. We didn't understand what was happening, and neither did the workers.

I find it hard to believe that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change doesn't care about this and didn't go meet with her. What do you have to say to the mayor?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: That's odd, because that's not the message I got from the workers I met.

Mr. Richard Martel: Which workers did you meet, Minister? Boisaco workers?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: We met with workers from several companies. As I told you, I went to Chibougamau. I met with workers there, in Lac-Saint-Jean and virtually. These people understand that the future of their jobs and the forest sector depends on the health of the forest. You and your colleagues in the Conservative Party either don't understand that or don't want to. I'm not sure which.

Mr. Richard Martel: Minister—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You're talking about the consequences of the order when it hasn't even been drafted. We've done some analysis based on some preliminary findings.

I know you like fearmongering.

Mr. Richard Martel: No, Minister.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I get that it's the house model, but the fact is, we look at all the impacts of the decisions we make, including the socio-economic impacts. That's an obligation.

Mr. Richard Martel: Minister, we're talking about the order.

You can't guarantee that your order will save the caribou population or enable it to grow, but we know for sure that it will kill jobs. It doesn't make sense. It doesn't work.

I'm thinking of the people who bought houses, who are going to lose their jobs, who have only known this for generations, and I simply can't believe the minister would be insensitive to that.

• (1740)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Of course not.

It just baffles me how, when it comes to caribou, or conservation, or health impacts, or plastic pollution or climate change, you and your party are sticking your heads in the sand. You don't have a solution. You'd choose to sacrifice caribou, because you don't think they matter.

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Guilbeault—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As far as you're concerned, forests can go down the tubes. You don't care.

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Guilbeault, that's not true.

Before I give the floor to the next person, I will reiterate that you can't guarantee that your order will save the caribou population or grow the herd. Can you guarantee that?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Earlier, I told your colleague that we've successfully restored caribou populations in Canada by working together. We can do it and we've done it before.

Mr. Richard Martel: I'll let the next person go ahead. Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Thank you.

How much time is left, Chair?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Minister Guilbeault, in your opening remarks, you mentioned the carbon tax. Will you remove the carbon tax from home heating for all Canadians this winter?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You're wrong. I was talking about the carbon pricing system in Quebec, which uses a form of cap and trade. That system is different from the federal one.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Whoa. Hang on. Hang on—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I was talking about the provincial system. I'm happy to reread the part—

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: I cannot hear the translation. Can you start over?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Hold on. Thank you.

[*English*]

You didn't get interpretation?

Mr. Dan Mazier: No. It was really delayed, so I didn't hear the first part.

The Chair: Okay. I'll give you a few more seconds, but as I said to Mr. Boulerice, we're really here to talk about the caribou, not the price on carbon.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Chair—

The Chair: I know you can link it somehow.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Somehow? He mentioned it.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I just want a simple answer: Will you remove the carbon tax from home heating bills this winter for all Canadians?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You referred to my speech. In my speech, I talked about the Government of Quebec. We often congratulate the Government of Quebec for being an environmental leader by adopting carbon pricing. I was talking about how the Quebec government does carbon pricing with a cap-and-trade system, which is completely different from how it works in the rest of the country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Chatel, you have the floor.

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

Minister, I don't know where my Conservative colleagues were during all the committee meetings about caribou, but we heard from the unions. They pleaded with us to keep forests healthy because jobs are at stake. They were here. They told us what the solutions are. Workers need healthy forests to ensure their own health, their jobs and their future in rural regions that depend on forestry. They proposed solutions that my Conservative colleagues completely ignored. Among other things, they talked about rethinking the forest and looking at a range of options for developing the forest industry. Another proposed solution is to do more with the resource. Instead of sending four-by-four lumber to the United States, we need to do more processing.

I know that's not your portfolio, but is there a conversation about that happening with the forest industry?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: My colleague, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, and other cabinet colleagues are the ones having those discussions. When I was in Chibougamau, I visited the Chantiers Chibougamau plant. It would be worthwhile for the committee to go there. They do 3D digitization of every piece of wood that enters that plant to maximize what they can get in terms of harvesting. Those products are used to build bridges and stadiums. The company is very innovative. I think this kind of innovation is the future of the forest in Quebec and probably elsewhere in the country. There are a lot of things going on in the industry.

You're right, the Conservatives claim to be concerned about the fate of workers when there's an election campaign going on. Yet, when workers come here and explain what should be done, the Conservatives ignore them and pretend they haven't said a thing or that what they said was like what we heard from Mr. Martel. However, as you've heard, that's not at all what happened and that's not at all how workers see things.

• (1745)

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: It's shocking to see them playing politics at workers' expense. Workers' unions come to the committee to tell us how to solve the problem, but the Conservatives completely ignore them. I just can't fathom it.

What short-term measures could minimize the impact of an order? We don't know the terms of the order exactly, but my understanding is that the province has to come up with a credible plan to protect the caribou. That's actually what all the stakeholders asked us for. People are pleading with us to make sure that Quebec is a partner in finding solutions. If that doesn't happen, and we end up

having to proceed with an order, what measures would do the best job of minimizing the socio-economic impact and the impact on the forestry sector in Quebec, according to your analysis?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I suggested an example when I was talking to Mr. Simard of the Bloc Québécois earlier. The federal government signed an agreement with British Columbia to invest nearly \$500 million over the next few years, and the province will invest roughly the same amount to address very similar problems. We already had a caribou protection agreement with British Columbia. Now we also have an agreement on old-growth forests, creating other protected spaces and measures to help workers who may be impacted in certain sectors.

We're ready to have those conversations to see what federal levers can be used. We're prepared to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in Quebec to help support both biodiversity and jobs, but, again, the Government of Quebec has to sit down at the table with us so we can have those conversations, as we have done with a number of other Canadian provinces.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: We talked about workers, but there's also the forestry industry. I have two forestry companies in my riding. They're ready to embrace a vision that involves doing more processing and innovation. Might they benefit from these investments in rethinking the forest?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: That kind of investment in technological or industrial innovation is more in the wheelhouse of Mr. Champagne, our colleague at the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. My department does have some measures relating to reforestation. That's the kind of thing we're working on with the Department of Natural Resources.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

That brings us to the end of the first hour of the meeting.

I understand you have to leave us, Minister, but the departmental representatives you brought with you can stay for another hour. They'll be joined by Marie-Josée Couture, acting director general, Canadian Wildlife Service, and Nicholas Winfield, director general, Canadian Wildlife Service.

Ms. Couture and Mr. Winfield, please take a seat at the table. We'll continue the meeting.

Because the meeting wasn't interrupted, the next round of questions won't be six minutes per person. We'll continue with five-minute rounds and two-and-a-half-minute rounds.

We'll start with Mr. Martel.

• (1750)

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

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here in person. We really appreciate it.

I'd like to know if the proposed order 100% guarantees the restoration of the three target caribou populations.

Ms. Tara Shannon (Assistant Deputy Minister, Biodiversity and Canadian Wildlife Services, Department of the Environment): I can start. I'll answer in English if that's okay.

[English]

Mr. Richard Martel: Yes. That's not a problem for me.

Ms. Tara Shannon: The order cannot guarantee an outcome. However, it is our experience with existing orders that the populations of the targeted species have not declined and I think in most cases have actually improved in terms of outcomes. I'm talking about not just...

This would be the first order with respect to boreal caribou, but we do have orders in place respecting other species, those being the sage grouse in the Prairies and the western chorus frog in two locations in Quebec.

I can ask if my colleague Nicholas Winfield would like to add any precision to that, if you'd like.

Mr. Nicholas Winfield (Director General, Canadian Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment): Sure.

It is the first step towards the recovery of the species; it is not the only step that is required to guarantee the recovery of the population.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Everyone is talking about climate change. It's 26°C in some regions today. Some changes are caused by humans but aren't industrial. Caribou have certain preferences when it comes to locating food. What are your thoughts on that?

Do you realize that the glass dome principle won't take care of everything threatening the caribou?

[English]

Ms. Tara Shannon: I'll start my response by noting that in the first instance.... I'll go back to the imminent threat assessment that we completed, which is science based. The focus of that threat assessment is on anthropogenic impacts on the species. It doesn't address all impacts, so yes, we are aware there are other factors that are impacting species.

I'll turn to Nicholas again if there's anything he would like to add from his perspective.

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: I don't know this term you used, the "*cloche de verre*", but I assume you mean that putting a glass cover on this and then assuming you can resolve all the issues within the cover is the issue.

Each of these populations occupies a range, a historical range, a geographical area where it has existed. The scientific assessment has been about what is required to recover those populations within their historical range, taking into account human disturbance. There are habitat variables—the loss of habitat—and predator variables at play, and also the level of reproductive success.

All of those things were taken into account in assessing the impacts on the population. The proposal to advance an emergency order is one step towards recovering the population, but it is not the only measure that is required for their recovery.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: I'm from Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. I'd like to know if the analysis takes into account the fact that, in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, in my riding, we're already cutting all the allowable timber and that there are chain reactions. Was that taken into consideration?

• (1755)

[English]

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: I can try to answer that question.

The three areas where the order is being considered are areas where the level of disturbance is greater than the minimum required for the survival of the population, and the disturbance rates are going up, so the trend in terms of the ability for these species to recover is a declining trend, and it is based on the disturbance levels within those areas.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We have to stop there because that's more than five minutes.

We'll go now to Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the officials for joining us today.

I have some questions regarding our obligations, but before I get to those, I wanted to ask about the inevitability of the further decline of caribou populations if the status quo and work as usual, business as usual, are permitted to continue without any oversight, changes or innovations.

The question was posed: Is this a guarantee that populations will increase? I think we all know there are no guarantees in this type of work, but there are obligations that we must do from a legal perspective, and then there is also really good science, which we must follow in order to achieve these ambitions.

My question is, what will the status quo achieve?

Ms. Tara Shannon: I'll start and I'll ask my colleagues to add if they would like to.

Simply put, the status quo—no action to protect the caribou—would result in their further decline. With respect to the herds that are in pens, if there are no actions that would protect habitat that could be used in the future, what we predict is that there would be no further existence in the wild of those herds.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you.

My original questions were with respect to our legal obligations as signatories for various commitments for preserving and conserving biodiversity. It's my understanding that the Province of Quebec has signed similar obligations. They're signatories to all the same agreements, which are international.

Could you inform the committee on whether you feel this is optional, a choice for both the provincial Government of Quebec and the federal Government of Canada, or whether you feel we have an obligation as signatories to these international agreements to preserve and conserve biodiversity and to stand up for species that are at risk and endangered and that can't cast ballots and lobby the government?

Ms. Tara Shannon: Canada is a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Government of Quebec plays a very active role, in the context of that convention, on behalf of local governments. Both Canada and the Government of Quebec have endorsed the Kunming-Montreal global biodiversity framework. It includes a number of goals and targets. Target 4 of that framework is the halt and reverse of species decline. It's not necessarily a hard legal obligation; it is a moral obligation and a commitment that both Canada and Quebec made in the context of that global biodiversity framework.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: If an individual, an organization or a government were to sign on to those types of agreements and then not follow through with commitments and actions, is it a question of morality or is it a question of integrity and of doing as we say we're going to do?

Ms. Tara Shannon: I should indicate that in the context of the framework, Canada is obligated to deposit with the United Nations every year a report on our progress vis-à-vis those targets, so yes, we would be called into question by the convention if we were to not make progress toward those targets.

• (1800)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: With my remaining time, I have a question about sustainable forestry.

Would any of you four be prepared to talk about sustainable forestry? I know that we're talking about caribou here, but Canadians need lumber, Canadians need an economy and Canadians need jobs, so it's reasonable to say that we also need a forestry sector.

We've had people on the committee in the last couple of meetings talking about a truly sustainable forestry. Can you provide any insight on other jurisdictions that have taken actions to ensure that their forestry sector is not leading to the inevitable decline of species at risk? What can we learn from some of them?

Ms. Tara Shannon: I don't think the four of us at this table are well placed to respond to forest practices. What we can say is that we do work closely with our colleagues at the Canadian Forest Service when we are approaching issues with respect to species at risk.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll have to stop there and go to Madame Pauzé.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Do I have five minutes, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No, you have two and a half minutes because this is the third round.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Okay. I have a lot of questions, but not a lot of time in which to ask them.

Ms. Shannon, I asked the minister a question about Novador. You were there. If I'm not mistaken, when the company submitted the proposal, the boreal caribou was already considered a threatened species. Why did you let the proposal advance if you knew from the start that Novador's project would be located in essential habitat for one of the herds?

[English]

Ms. Tara Shannon: I'm unable to speak to the specific project that you're referring to. We would not have had any role in approvals of the environmental assessment.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I have another question for you.

Earlier, there was a conversation about controlling predators, but it sounds like that's not a good thing. Some researchers say that other governments, including the governments of British Columbia and Manitoba, have instituted predator control measures that, when enforced rigorously and paired with a targeted restoration and preservation strategy, produce results. Do you have an opinion on that approach?

[English]

Ms. Tara Shannon: I'll respond briefly and then I'll ask Nicholas to add to that.

I think predator control is one avenue. It is one of the tools. It is not the only tool. The closure and rehabilitation of roads are also very important, because roads fragment the caribou habitat. When the habitat of caribou is fragmented, then they do worse.

I'll ask Nicholas to add to that.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: That's not necessary.

My understanding is that, contrary to what we heard earlier, predator control is a viable option. It worked well in British Columbia.

Yesterday I found an article about how, in the spring of 2022, the federal government signed a caribou protection agreement with the Government of Ontario. Prior to that, the Ontario government had abolished environmental protection measures and ignored federal requirements for species at risk in order to advance its unsustainable forestry and mining development projects. There are no meaningful caribou habitat protection measures.

Is this a double standard? Would an order that applies to Quebec not apply to Ontario?

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're at three minutes.

Ms. Shannon, you can answer when you have the floor again.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I think that Ms. Pauzé's question is excellent. Actually, I would like to hear the answer.

The Chair: Okay.

[English]

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: Thank you for the question related to what's happening in Ontario.

We did sign an agreement with Ontario two years ago to work with them to find solutions with respect to the way in which they manage the boreal forest, recognizing that there are similar issues in Ontario with respect to declining populations.

The commitment is to find a way to ensure that there is a balanced approach to conserving boreal caribou and sustaining forestry. I'm not suggesting that the current state is acceptable, but we've acknowledged that the changes and the advancement of policies and procedures in Ontario are needed, and they've acknowledged this also.

• (1805)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

It has often been said that a mature or old enough forest is extremely important for boreal caribou to survive and return to growth. Personally, I am always concerned when we destroy mature forests and then attempt reforestation, sometimes by planting trees, without necessarily creating real forests.

What is your vision or project for creating a habitat for the boreal caribou that meets their needs, particularly in terms of mature forests?

[English]

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: Thank you for your question.

You are correct that all scientific evidence suggests that boreal caribou are dependent on mature forests and connected landscapes that allow them to escape from predators and access food supply, etc. The recovery strategy calls for greater than 65% undisturbed habitat to ensure 60% likelihood of survival.

Therefore, everything we do in negotiating with provinces on range planning is to look at ways to manage a forest to ensure there is a constant supply of older-age forests and connectivity among those forests. You are therefore correct in your understanding of the issue, and many provinces and their experts are developing their forest plans to achieve that goal.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Leslie now.

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

I'd like to pick up on that last note. It seems as though we're taking a "hurry up and wait" approach in many ways. I understand that the minister said there was a definite need to act, but we seem to be imposing measures that are going to take decades to have any effect. We talk about road closures and we talk about reforestation; those will not happen overnight. These are remote areas. We are not planting semi-mature trees, so it will be a very long process.

The preliminary socio-economic analysis the department produced says that the incremental benefits of an order cannot be assessed due to uncertainty with respect to how an emergency order would increase the probability of recovering the species. Now, Minister Guilbeault falsely said that maternal penning and wolf predation reductions don't work, and I appreciate that CWF has clarified that they do in fact work. Perhaps it is a fair criticism to say that it is not the long-term solution and that we still may need to undertake efforts like this, but the science in a peer-reviewed article by one of our previous presenters from Ecological Applications shows that the best way for an annual instantaneous rate of increase is penning and wolf reduction.

Therefore, my question to the department and to CWF is this: Why would we take an approach that we don't know is going to work but that we know, if it does work, will take a very long time, when, if we are in such an emergency decree situation, we could take action that is more immediate, that will be more effective and that will buy us time to take on these more important, longer-term solutions?

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: I think Quebec has already acknowledged the situation and therefore put the animals in pens in the first place. We have supported, through funding, the penning of those animals in order to guarantee at least their survival in the short term. Quebec is managing those populations with a vision that those populations will increase through captive breeding and then will be released into the wild. The issue is that there is no habitat for them to go to. The actions that are proposed now are to ensure that there is habitat for them to go to.

You're absolutely correct that the balanced approach between predator control and wildlife management through penning and through captive breeding, complemented by having habitat to return to, is the solution, but you are also correct that it will take time. In every other jurisdiction, range planning is about establishing multi-decadal solutions to ensure that there is enough habitat for these animals to return to and survive.

Mr. Branden Leslie: What level of confidence do you have that this will be in any way successful? You have three options. You can do nothing; you can have an emergency order that destroys a bunch of industries, a bunch of jobs and a bunch of communities in Quebec; or you can take an approach to buy time and then work with the appropriate jurisdiction, the provincial government, to develop a robust plan to actually achieve this.

Out of those three, which would be the fastest approach, in your view?

• (1810)

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: The do-nothing approach will result in their extirpation. The emergency order is seeking to ensure that there is habitat for them to go to. The third option is the one that we would like to do, which is to negotiate with Quebec, but in terms of speed, we need a partner to negotiate with in order to have success on the recovery.

Mr. Branden Leslie: What is the best-case timeline scenario for a successful increase in population with only this emergency order in place?

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: There are three populations. There are nine animals in captivity in one location. There are 35 in another. The numbers are decreasing in Pipmuacan to the point where the actual number for them to be sustainable is 200. We are trying to ensure that there is an option for those animals in Pipmuacan, which are still in the wild, to have sufficient population numbers to be self-sustaining.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I understand that, but how long will it take? You close the road. You try to enforce it. What is the timeline for that?

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: In the case of Pipmuacan, it is about halting a decline. In the case of Charlevoix and Val-d'Or, it is about creating a future state that will take 40, 50 or 60 years for there to be sufficient habitat for the animals to return to.

Mr. Branden Leslie: What happens if the predators kill them all in the next 40, 50 or 60 years?

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: Then there will be no more animals left.

Mr. Branden Leslie: So why wouldn't you take an action that actually prevents that from happening?

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: They're in a pen—

Mr. Branden Leslie: I don't understand that.

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: They're in a pen.

Mr. Branden Leslie: In impenetrable pens?

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: No, they're in a pen, and they're protected against predators—

Mr. Branden Leslie: Okay.

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: —as a measure of last resort. They are already in an emergency precarious situation.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Has there ever been any penetration of that pen? I know that in the B.C. example, they actually have riflemen go around the outside of their maternal penning nets in the first nation and they're doing it there. Has there ever been an instance when that has failed?

The Chair: You can give a quick answer to that. Has there been penetration of a pen?

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: I don't know.

A voice: Good question.

The Chair: We'll go to Madame Chatel.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: From the beginning, it has been clear that the caribou are in an enclosure to ensure that they do not disappear. The goal is to restore their environment.

We've talked a lot about the importance of coming up with a solution. We've heard that from the witnesses. All levels of government must work together to find a solution. The heartfelt plea from forestry workers was that we need to rethink the forest and ensure its sustainability, because they depend on it. Their homes, their families, their children and their future in their regions depend on

forestry-related jobs. The forest is not healthy, as demonstrated by the disappearance of the caribou. This is a heartfelt plea and a wake-up call.

Can you tell us about the history of your discussions with the Province of Quebec? It is a key partner. Quebec really has to be at the table in these discussions and together we have to find solutions. Can you give us a brief history of the discussions you have had with your Quebec counterparts?

Ms. Tara Shannon: I'll turn it over to Marie-Josée Couture.

Ms. Marie-Josée Couture (Acting Director General, Canadian Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment): Thank you for the question.

We have indeed co-operated with the Government of Quebec. We've made two agreements with them. There was an agreement in 2018, then another in 2019, which lasted until 2022. Under those agreements, we supported activities undertaken by the Government of Quebec in connection with caribou. We supported those activities pending the development of the strategy. There are many types of activities that have been financially supported by the Government of Canada.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: You have previously made agreements with Quebec. That involves negotiation and co-operation. Where are you now in the agreements and the discussions with your fellow public servants on the Quebec side?

Ms. Marie-Josée Couture: The minister mentioned it earlier. We resumed negotiations in 2022 to reach a new agreement. Those negotiations were suspended pending the tabling of the strategy that Quebec had announced. Discussions between officials still continued, but not at the same pace as before, since the strategy expected of the Government of Quebec was a key part of those negotiations.

• (1815)

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: That's great.

In some of the testimony we heard at the committee, we sense the concern of people living in these communities who are worried about their jobs and their future. We've heard a lot of anxiety about how governments are actually ensuring the sustainability of the forest.

Do you have a timeline for when that order will be enacted, and can you share it with us? Where are you in the process? What are the next steps? When exactly will the decisions be made?

[English]

Ms. Tara Shannon: The consultation period closed formally the day we got this, last Sunday, the 15th. We need to undertake an analysis of all the input. The minister described that previously there has been a lot of input across all sectors, so we will be preparing a what-we-heard report.

As the minister indicated, the development of an order itself takes some time. We're talking about months. We don't have an exact timeline at the moment. I can just say that this is a process of months.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: If Quebec comes up with a solution and a plan during that period, the order could be withdrawn. Is that correct?

[English]

The Chair: Could we have a quick answer on this?

If the Quebec government comes forward with a plan, the decree may not go ahead. I think that's the question. Is that correct?

Ms. Tara Shannon: Yes.

[Translation]

The Chair: That brings round one to a close. We'll now go to a second round of five minutes.

Mr. Mazier, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Mr. Hermanutz, on May 10 Minister Guilbeault recommended that an emergency order be made. Is this correct, yes or no?

Mr. Derek Hermanutz (Director General, Economic Analysis Directorate, Department of the Environment): I'll defer to my colleague.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Ms. Shannon, go ahead.

Ms. Tara Shannon: I don't have the timeline in front of me at the moment, but yes, in the month of May, the minister did make a finding that there was an imminent threat facing the boreal caribou in Quebec.

Mr. Dan Mazier: The emergency order was made. Okay. Thank you.

On June 19, the Liberal government announced it would move forward with an emergency order. Is this correct, yes or no?

Ms. Tara Shannon: There was a notification published on June 19 that the government was proceeding with a regulatory process, yes.

Mr. Dan Mazier: It was an emergency order consultation, yes.

Mr. Hermanutz, is the government considering prohibiting road construction through this emergency order?

Mr. Derek Hermanutz: I will defer to my colleague.

Ms. Tara Shannon: The issue of roads and the closure of roads would be one thing that would be under consideration in the context of the development of an order. The order has not been developed.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Roads are being considered.

Ms. Tara Shannon: It could be one of the things considered, yes.

Mr. Dan Mazier: You're considering prohibiting road construction through this order. Okay.

Is this government considering prohibiting the expansion of existing roads through this emergency order, yes or no?

Ms. Tara Shannon: Perhaps, Mr. Chair, I'll just indicate that the issue of roads with respect to caribou would be a subject in the con-

sideration of an order. That would be all aspects of roads in the context of critical habitat for boreal caribou.

Again, these issues would need to be determined and defined through the development of an actual emergency order.

Mr. Dan Mazier: So they are considering prohibiting road construction through this emergency order.

Ms. Tara Shannon: The order has not been developed yet.

Mr. Dan Mazier: They are considering it.

Ms. Tara Shannon: It's something that would be a subject of consideration—

Mr. Dan Mazier: Yes.

Ms. Tara Shannon: —in the context of the critical habitat for boreal caribou.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Okay.

I'll pass it off to Mr. Leslie.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

• (1820)

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you.

I'll start with you, Mr. Hermanutz.

The analysis states, "If the emergency order goes ahead, there would be 10 mining projects shut down at a cost of \$20 million to \$45 million." Did you calculate what job loss would be associated with that too?

Mr. Derek Hermanutz: On the mining side, I don't have those numbers in front of me. I think the analysis suggests that those are projects that are at risk and are part of the analysis. It doesn't say that those projects will necessarily be shut down.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I understand that.

In your analysis, it concludes that "about 1,400 direct forest sector jobs could vanish" if Minister Guilbeault's radical order is enacted, which is a little bit lower than that of many industry experts but is still a very substantial number.

Could you describe for us what you think would be the impacts on the communities where those 1,400 people would be if this order were enacted as per the modelling that you've done?

Mr. Derek Hermanutz: I can start with the analysis that we've done. That was with the Canadian Forest Service.

According to NRCan and the Canadian Forest Service, approximately 1,400 direct forest sector jobs may be at risk. Again, that doesn't mean that they're necessarily—

Mr. Branden Leslie: Could it be more?

Mr. Derek Hermanutz: This was our best analysis at the time.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Is there a chance that it's actually much more?

Mr. Derek Hermanutz: That is direct jobs. We do look at indirect jobs. There could be 800 at risk, as we have in the analysis.

Mr. Branden Leslie: That's the maximum. You think that if you enact this, there is no chance that more than 2,200 jobs are destroyed by this—

Mr. Derek Hermanutz: No. There is obviously uncertainty around this. It could be higher and it could be lower. It's in the middle of our range. I would stress, as the minister said, that this is very preliminary analysis. We're looking forward to the results of the consultations.

Mr. Branden Leslie: In the contingent analysis, you discuss that the radical emergency order could “lower Canada's reputation as a reliable mining destination”, which we've already seen plummet due to the over-regulation under this most recent Liberal government's decisions.

What dollar value would you put on the reputational damage that could be done if we took this approach?

Mr. Derek Hermanutz: First, that's a comment that comes from our NRCan experts on the mining sector. I don't think you can quantify that in dollar terms.

The Chair: You have about 10 seconds, Mr. Leslie.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Between ECCC and NRCan, do you think you have a full grasp of the potential ramifications of this decision if enacted?

The Chair: Could we have a quick yes or no on that?

Mr. Derek Hermanutz: I think at the macro level, we do. We're looking forward to getting more information from the consultations on individual mills and communities.

The Chair: Madame Chatel is next.

[Translation]

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

Ms. Shannon, we were just talking about reputational damage. In Europe, they are in the process of establishing standards for the purchase of forest products that meet our COP15 commitments and those related to the protection of biodiversity. International forums are talking about it. If we don't protect species at risk, what will be the reputational price that Canada will pay, particularly when exporting our forest products?

[English]

Ms. Tara Shannon: I don't know that it's something I can quantify. I think what I can say is that we have had expressions of concern in reach-outs from international organizations that are looking at such certification. We see that they are very much interested in the status of boreal caribou, not just in Quebec but across Canada.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I just want to mention to my Conservative colleagues that there is an economic cost to our exports if we don't protect our biodiversity. No one will purchase our products. They will no longer be exportable. What's good for the environment is good for the economy. That is the mentality we need to adopt.

We talked about other countries and what is being done elsewhere, but here in Canada, are there other provinces that are not protecting caribou to the extent required under the federal Species at Risk Act?

[English]

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: Every other province in Canada has signed a section 11 agreement under the Species at Risk Act to advance conservation measures within their jurisdiction. With those agreements, the federal government is providing funding to support the actions around range planning and other measures required for their conservation.

Similarly, Environment Canada is working with indigenous groups and indigenous communities to support their role in conserving and sustaining boreal caribou populations.

• (1825)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you.

I would like to go back to the consultations you had. We've had some here. I'm sure you've been following the testimony.

I saw a consensus emerging, not necessarily among the committee members, but among the witnesses. Here is a challenge for you: Do you see a consensus emerging from these consultations? In your consultations, did you see any area that is a win for everyone in the short and medium terms?

[English]

Ms. Tara Shannon: I'll ask Marie-Josée to respond on the question of consultations. She's been leading much of those.

I would say that it's clear that everyone agrees there's an issue with respect to boreal caribou and that there is a desire to balance the environment and the economy. At a macro level, yes, I think there's a lot of agreement.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Josée Couture: Actually, Ms. Shannon is right. The importance for all parties to sit down together and work together is perhaps another theme in the same vein. That was a recurring theme or a potential solution during the consultations, but not systematically, of course.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Mr. Chair, do I have time left?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Okay. I will speak for 30 seconds.

We did sense the urgency of the situation, and I sensed that the order was a wake-up call. It is a heartfelt plea, especially from the workers who live off logging and the forestry industry, and the people who represent them, such as the mayor who came to testify before this committee. We need to have a deeper conversation. Now we have an emergency we need to deal with, but we have to get together to talk and rethink the forest. Do you have the same wish?

The Chair: There is really not enough time to answer your question.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Do you have the same wish?

The Chair: Yes or no? Do you have the same wish?

Ms. Marie-Josée Couture: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Ms. Couture. I am sorry to rush you, but otherwise we will fall behind.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Winfield, you were talking about agreements earlier. I am editorializing, but I want to come back to the fact that, years ago, Ontario abolished its provincial environmental protection measures. Then the province ignored federal species at risk requirements to expand its logging. When you signed the agreement in 2022, it did not contain any significant measures to protect endangered caribou habitat. I call that a double standard that depends on the province.

I'm going to go to a question about the preliminary socio-economic analysis. The emergency order entails costs of \$650 million to \$850 million over 10 years for the forestry sector. For the mining sector, it's \$20 million to \$45 million, also over 10 years. Since the economic impact is 20 times less for the mining sector than for the forestry sector, and we know that mining is harmful, not just to caribou but also to the environment, why exempt all mining companies in their entirety from your order?

You are telling me that this order has not yet been drafted, but it seems to me that we should have a more balanced approach, one that considers all the factors. I get the impression that the forest is being punished to benefit the mines.

[English]

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: Thank you for the question.

In the consultations, we have discussed what could be exempted from the order. It's not what will be exempted, but simply an approach for how to tackle the balance between biodiversity or conservation gains and economic losses.

There is a difference in the scale of landscape-level change between forestry operations and mining. Both need to be managed effectively to protect caribou, but one of the differences relates to the physical footprint and the size of the impact. In the context of forestry, it tends to have a larger footprint on forests than mining, and therefore on caribou habitat, but in both cases, they need to be managed sustainably.

Your point is taken. Thank you.

My colleague can answer on the socio-economic aspect.

• (1830)

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Yes.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I thought I had five minutes.

The Chair: No, it's five minutes for the Liberals and the Conservatives, but you had two and a half minutes. Sometimes Mr. Boulerice allows the witnesses to answer your question, which is very gracious of him, but it is up to him to decide.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Winfield, a little earlier, you said that, in order for there to be a 60% chance of survival, the disturbance rate had to be reduced to 65% undisturbed habitat. I want to make sure I understand. If we reach that threshold, there will still be a 40% chance of non-survival. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: Yes, you understand it correctly.

In the recovery strategy that was prepared in 2012, there was a scientific correlation between the disturbance level and the recruitment of calves in the reproductive rate. In that document, given the concern around impacts to forestry and impacts to other landscape levels, there was a policy decision to acknowledge that the relationship still resulted in only a 60% probability of success.

It recognizes the impact of these policies on forestry. The very document written in 2012 already took a risk-based approach in order to minimize socio-economic impacts.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: It's still surprising. A 40% chance of non-survival is staggering. That's almost a 50% chance.

[English]

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: There's a 60% probability of success, so there's a 40% probability of non-success.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: We often hear it said that mining projects, rare earth or rare metal projects, wind turbines and other renewable energy projects, for example, would be included in the exceptions set out in the order, which you are probably assessing at the moment.

If everything is an exception, what will be left at the end?

[English]

The Chair: Give a quick answer.

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: This is going to be the subject of the evidence we've gathered through consultations to determine what is possible—what can be exempted and what cannot be exempted.

The Chair: Mr. Martel is next.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Winfield, I know full well that the order is still a long way away, but I understood that there were no guarantees. Earlier, I asked you some questions, and you told me that this was a first step. If the order doesn't work out, what are you going to do?

[English]

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: We will only know in the future. I can't predict what we will do in the future.

First of all, we don't have an order in place now. If an order is put in place, we will continue to assess the impacts and we will determine what the next steps should be.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: It says that the protection requested for the caribou population in the Pipmuacan area is intended to prevent us from ending up in a situation similar to the one in Charlevoix in 10 years. We agree on that. However, how can we assume that, in 10 years, the situation could be similar to the one in Charlevoix, when I'm told that there is only one reference inventory for the Pipmuacan sector, done in 2019?

• (1835)

[English]

Mr. Nicholas Winfield: I'm trying to understand the question. I think you are referring to how much certainty we have that the actions we are proposing will prevent the reduction in the population, and the answer to that question is that it is only when there is sufficient habitat for the animals to survive that we have a likelihood of protecting the population.

I cannot guarantee the outcome, but without habitat, the animals have no possibility of reversing their population decline.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Does the economic analysis take into account the ripple effects?

There has been such an impact on the forestry sector recently that this new decline in logging availability means more than just a downfall. It means the difference between making a profit and taking a loss. There could really be a complete shutdown of the sector.

[English]

Mr. Derek Hermanutz: I would respond by saying that in the analysis we do look at the direct jobs, and the indirect jobs as well, at the macro level, and we do acknowledge that over the last decade there have been challenges facing the Quebec forest sector due to other external factors—lumber price volatility, tariffs—and employment has fallen over the last decade by nearly 7%.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: In the analysis, it says that the workforce is aging. We are talking about 27.7% in the forestry sector versus 23.3% in other sectors. It's not clear: Do you consider that a mitigating or aggravating factor?

[English]

Mr. Derek Hermanutz: I think it's just one of the pieces of context that we wanted to put into the analysis. We're looking at this specific order, but we want to put it in the frame of the challenges that the Quebec forest sector is facing.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: To my mind, this is definitely an aggravating factor.

Have you considered the fact that the forestry sector is one of the main economic activities in the country's most aging regions?

[English]

Mr. Derek Hermanutz: We haven't looked at other sectors in this analysis. We were just focusing on the forestry and mines.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Taylor Roy will end this hour.

Go ahead, Ms. Taylor Roy. You have five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I just want to say, Mr. Winfield, that I appreciate that you ended the last question by saying that the boreal caribou have no chance if an emergency order is not put in place. We may question what the probability of success is of this program, but we know they will not be here. They'll be extirpated if we do not do something.

As you know, from 2002, this species has been on the species at risk list. There's so much work that's been done over the years, and as several witnesses have said, these animals are the most studied of any in Canada. We know a lot about them.

There seems to be this tension attached to short-term profitability and job retention. Of course, jobs are very important. In fact, our government has created more jobs than any other government, but it's the role of government to look at the longer term and not just at short-term profit. I'm wondering if you could put this in context in terms of these jobs in the forestry sector.

When we have a Sustainable Jobs Act in place and we know that there has to be a transition and the health of these forests is so linked to the health of the caribou, are these jobs going to be there longer than another two or three years, say, if the caribou are extinct and these circumstances of climate change, forest fires and all these other things continue to grow? Are we looking at just a short-term solution as opposed to a long-term solution when we simply focus on saving the jobs and the types of jobs that are there today, rather than looking at long-term employment for these communities that are so important?

• (1840)

Ms. Tara Shannon: I don't feel we're well placed to speak to the future of the forestry industry in and of itself. To your point about the boreal caribou and their health being an indicator of the health of the forests, that is something I think we need to be taking into account and paying attention to, not only for the caribou but also for the future existence of the forests.

I would add that in the process of the consultations, we have, of course, been hearing from union members about the importance of balancing the protection of the caribou with the health of the sector and we have been acknowledging that their desire is to have a sustainable forestry sector.

I'll leave it there.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you.

I know this request for the emergency order was put forward by several first nations in Quebec, and they've been very concerned about the health of the boreal caribou. As I said, we've known about this for a long time.

Is there any indication that the lumber companies, the forestry companies and the pulp and paper companies have actually been taking action to address this issue in and of themselves?

We hear a lot that we don't need big government and we don't need government to intervene at all; we just need companies to make a profit and all will be well. I'm wondering what the companies have done to ensure that their forestry industry will have long-term sustainability and provide jobs for workers in the long term, not just the short term.

Ms. Tara Shannon: That's a question probably best directed to my colleagues at the Canadian Forest Service, who are not here. I will note, though, that the minister, during his remarks, spoke to some of the innovations he's seeing in the forestry sector in Quebec and elsewhere.

Again, I'll leave the question in its entirety to colleagues from the forestry sector, who I'm sorry are not here today.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you.

I think that's important, because they've known about these issues for a long time. I think that at times these companies do innovate, but it's only when faced with a real challenge and a hard line that they actually take the action that's needed to address some of these problems.

In terms of this balance between protecting our biodiversity, our climate and our forests on the one hand, versus short-term profit and maximum extraction on the other, we need to have these companies play a role as well. The unions and the workers seem to be on board. They want to ensure that there's a healthy forest and a long-term, sustainable industry for them and perhaps for their children to also participate in. However, we seem to be missing the full commitment of some of these forestry companies.

The Chair: Thank you very much

This ends our second hour. I want to thank the officials for being here and answering all of the members' questions.

We'll take a little break while we bring on board the next set of witnesses. It shouldn't take very long.

Thank you again.

• (1840)

(Pause)

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Order, please. We're back in session.

I would like to point out that the sound tests were conducted with the witnesses who are joining us remotely via the Zoom application.

We will hear from two witnesses, including a group of three Boisaco Inc. representatives: Mr. Joyce Dionne, harvesting team worker; Mr. Joseph-Pierre Dufour, stationary engineer; and Ms. Valérie Dufour, sales and transportation coordinator. We also welcome, in a personal capacity, Mr. Jean-Pierre Jetté, forestry engineer.

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

Mr. Jean-Pierre Jetté (Forest Engineer, As an Individual): Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on boreal caribou.

I am a forest engineer, retired from the Quebec Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, where I worked for 30 years. I still remain active, notably working on management issues in the boreal forest.

Over the past 15 to 20 years, I have witnessed the debates concerning the fate of the boreal caribou. Throughout this period, I've always felt that the vast majority of stakeholders were keen to strike a balance, and that no one wanted to see a catastrophe for forest communities. In my opinion, this is a valuable asset to cultivate. This quest for balance certainly involves optimizing protection efforts. The borders of the areas to be protected have been redrawn a thousand times. Measures with the least impact on the industry have often been examined.

However, if we are to find a consensual solution, we also need to look at the other end of the spectrum. The current business model and its value chain must also be part of the equation. These are not immutable and must evolve. Defending the status quo at all costs is not a position conducive to compromise, especially since an evolution of the business model could make room for caribou while offering interesting economic prospects. We owe it to ourselves to explore this path.

Several players in the forestry world are talking about the need for a just transition. I agree, but I would add that a concrete and rigorous discussion on the subject is undeniably part of a consensus-building process. What we need to do now is to move beyond general ideas and start drawing up a just transition plan. In my opinion, such a plan should have three components.

First, short-term mitigation measures must be put in place to offset immediate impacts. Several options are possible. One example is the possibility of revising plant supply structures. This has already been done in the past. In addition, silvicultural programs requiring the workforce usually involved in harvesting are conceivable. In addition, other regional worksites could provide employment for certain categories of workers; I'm thinking of wind farms, among others.

The second and most important aspect concerns the industrial transition itself. The sawmilling industry is already in a process of consolidation. In this context, there will be winners with more profitable mills, but there will also be losers with villages that will see their mills close. This is when we need to consider the development of new niches based on a value-added approach, or on the exploitation of wood that is currently available but underutilized by the industry. There are significant quantities of wood to be valorized. Wood chemistry could offer interesting options.

Finally, the third component consists of making adjustments to ensure a predictable supply for the next industrial generation. A number of problems currently compromise the expected wood supply, even disregarding caribou. The debate surrounding the order should lead to the creation of a working group to prepare a transition plan. To be successful, this group should call on independent experts and ensure transparency in its approach. It will also need financial support from both levels of government. It won't be an easy task, and the results are uncertain, but I refuse to believe that they will be zero. If not, what's the other option?

It takes a touch of naiveté to think that the caribou controversy will slowly die out as the last individuals are put into enclosures. If a credible plan to protect the caribou is not put in place soon, the conflict will persist and eventually become more radical. One consequence of this will be to put off investors. Yet they are essential players in the modernization of a timber industry that we hope will be robust and sustainable for the benefit of forest communities. Let's take advantage of the fact that everyone wants this future for the communities, and include all the ingredients in the discussion. That way, we'll be able to find a solution that truly brings people together.

I think my main message is to say that there are options, and this may be the only way forward we have.

• (1850)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jetté.

We will now hear from the representatives of Boisaco.

Mr. Dufour, you have the floor.

• (1855)

Mr. Joseph-Pierre Dufour (Stationary Engineer, Boisaco Inc.): Good evening. My name is Joseph-Pierre Dufour.

After 40 years of development, our current structure, which utilizes renewable forest resources, now uses 100% of the material. Although we are dependent on a single resource, its value is applied in a variety of economic sectors.

If you're already familiar with the Sacré-Coeur complex, you'll know that in addition to the Boisaco plant, which produces lumber,

it also includes the Sacopan plant, which uses the shavings to produce door panels, Granulco, which uses them to design pellets, and Ripco, which transforms wood shavings into equestrian bedding. To ensure that nothing goes to waste, our thermal power plants and boiler rooms burn the bark for our heat-intensive processes and, finally, send the ash to local farmers. I believe our complex is an exemplary model, supported by the local community and based on a vision of sustainable development.

The proposed emergency order jeopardizes over 600 direct jobs, hundreds of indirect jobs, contractors and businesses. Many families would be affected by the disappearance of the region's only economic engine. With a population of 5,000 spread over four municipalities, it's obvious that this would be catastrophic for the Haute-Côte-Nord and would also have negative repercussions for the Saguenay and Charlevoix regions.

Let's face it, we're not going to reinvent the Haute-Côte-Nord economy overnight. We're not in a major centre, but in a relatively isolated and remote region, where interesting jobs in our respective trades are hundreds of kilometres away. What's most likely to happen if worse comes to worst is that many families will leave for other regions, because here, there won't really be any jobs left to support them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Dufour and Mr. Dionne, you have three minutes in total.

Ms. Valérie Dufour (Coordinator, Sales and Transport, Boisaco Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Valérie Dufour and I have the privilege of working for Boisaco Inc. I'm also a municipal councillor for Sacré-Coeur. My spouse and I both work thanks to the Boisaco group's forestry operations.

I am appearing before you today so that you know that, since the announcement of the possible adoption of the order, our lives have literally been on pause. For example, when my children asked me this year what we were going to do over the summer vacation, I had to tell them that there would be no vacation this summer. I told them that if the order goes through as is, mom and dad will lose their jobs and have to move out of Sacré-Coeur. I promised them that I would do everything in my power to try to stay at home in Sacré-Coeur.

My family isn't the only one going through such times of uncertainty and anguish. The closure of Boisaco's plants would be catastrophic for Sacré-Coeur and its citizens. On behalf of myself, my spouse, my children, my family, my friends, my colleagues and the citizens of my village, I ask you to review the order and find plausible solutions. I remain hopeful that, together, we can find solutions that will enable us to keep our jobs and continue to earn a decent living. This is a huge cry from the heart to you this evening on behalf of all the dads and moms who, like me, have promised their children that they could continue to work and stay at home in Sacré-Coeur.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dufour.

Mr. Dionne, if you have anything to add, you have about one minute.

Mr. Joyce Dionne (Worker, Harvesting Team, Boisaco Inc.): Good evening, everyone.

My name is Joyce Dionne and I'm a wood harvesting specialist at Boisaco. The Dionne family has been harvesting wood for over 50 years. Even the children have the same passion as we do. I lead a team of 15 men, all as proud as I am of their forestry profession. The announcement of the order is a catastrophe for us. It jeopardizes the families of forestry workers.

The work of harvesting and management creates a renewable forest, which we all take care of by respecting biodiversity and environmental standards. What's more, forest management greatly reduces the risk of fire and allows the public to enjoy the area for leisure activities.

There's a way for everyone to benefit without the loss of thousands of direct and indirect jobs. I sincerely believe that with Boisaco's knowledge of the territory and the government's requirements, we can find solutions together to abolish this decree. To better understand the sector in question, I would like the members of your committee to visit our territory. They'll then have a better idea of the situation and be able to make a more informed decision.

Twenty-five years ago, when I started in forestry in this same area, there were 40 harvesters and three sawmills. Today, we have fewer than 10 harvesters and only one sawmill in the territory, and we're not in a position to operate it. Where will it all end? Because of the order, I'm feeling stress, anxiety and discouragement, which is upsetting everyone around me. I'd like you to think about the future of our young people in forestry, which would also be compromised by this order. Don't forget that we all depend on the forest.

Thank you for listening.

● (1900)

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

We'll begin this round of questions with Mr. Martel, for six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for coming here today.

Mr. Dufour, it always seems like the forest has a bad reputation. People still talk about the forest the way they did in the 1960s. But things have improved a lot. I'm sure you love the forest, and I'd like you to tell me about the benefits of the forest industry.

Mr. Joseph-Pierre Dufour: I work more on the processing side. As I explained, in our complex, everything we do is based on sustainable development, with secondary and tertiary processing. No material is wasted. One hundred per cent of it is put to use.

As for harvesting in the forest, Mr. Dionne would be better able to answer your question.

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Dionne, I'll let you continue.

Mr. Joyce Dionne: There's no doubt that over the past 25 years, everything has improved in the forest. We do special cuts with all kinds of adaptations, taking into account the protection of endangered species. We take care of everything.

It's not what it was 50 years ago. Don't think that foresters are forest "destroyers", it's not that at all. They don't just collect their cash and go home. Everyone cares about the forest.

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Dionne, in the forestry sector, we always hear that workers are workers from generation to generation. Often, it's the children who continue to work in the forest. Where you live, in Sacré-Coeur, is it anything like that?

Mr. Joyce Dionne: In Sacré-Coeur, everyone works for Boisaco. People are proud of their plant. Happiness is something you share. Everyone is happy. Without having to, the children are ready to continue what their parents did. They're proud of that.

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you.

Ms. Dufour, if Mr. Guilbeault imposes his order, what will it mean for you and your family?

Ms. Valérie Dufour: We will certainly not be able to stay in Sacré-Coeur. My husband and I both work in forestry operations. If, unfortunately, the order is adopted as is, one of the repercussions would probably be the closure of Boisaco. That would mean my husband and I would lose our jobs. We'd have to go elsewhere. It's a far cry from what we want. We've had the privilege of practising our trades outside, in large urban centres, but the call of the forest, the call of our community, quickly came back. We're in Sacré-Coeur by choice; we chose to work here.

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you, Ms. Dufour.

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

The Chair: You still have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Richard Martel: Ms. Dufour, it was touching when the mayor said that, if the order were imposed, there would be a risk that the community would disappear. I'll give you the floor.

● (1905)

Ms. Valérie Dufour: Indeed, the village's survival is threatened. The Boisaco group isn't just a company that hires people and creates jobs, it's a partner for our municipality. When we organize events or buy goods, Boisaco is always behind us. We can always count on them. For us, it's invaluable help.

Mr. Richard Martel: If the order is imposed, how do you see the future? Are you currently thinking about what you're going to do with your belongings, with your house, and where you're going to move? Have you considered this with your husband?

Ms. Valérie Dufour: Yes, we've been forced to think about it. We hope with all our hearts that it doesn't happen, but we're going through terrible anguish. If the Boisaco complex closes and I have to relocate my family, I'll have to sell my house to buy another. We know very well that the village of Sacré-Coeur is in danger of closing, and that's a source of worry, since we won't be able to sell our house. I have three young children, so how am I going to move, how am I going to relocate my family?

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you, Ms. Dufour.

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden, you now have the floor.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses who are participating in this evening's meeting.

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to all the workers in the forestry sector. Wood, and pulp and paper are sustainable products compared to other products, such as plastics. Thank you very much for your conscientious work, for your efforts in tree planting and reforestation, and for your contribution to the Canadian economy.

[*English*]

For what it's worth, you seem stressed, and I just want to express my sympathy with you, because this seems like a very emotional and stressful time for your families. You're working hard to provide for your families and contribute to the Canadian economy, and I want to acknowledge that.

My question is for Monsieur Jetté. It's about the future of forestry in Canada and about our ability and, frankly, obligation to ensure that there is one. We have to ensure that there is a future economy of forestry in Canada because we rely on it. We rely on the products, and we rely on the contributions to the economy. Workers rely on the money they make to provide for their families.

From my perspective.... We built a deck this summer out of wood. That wood was harvested in Canada. We need to ensure that we have a sustainable lumber and pulp and paper economy in Canada. That includes making sure that our commitments for biodiversity are also respected.

The term "balance" has come up a few times in this committee. We've had workers, industry representatives and scientists come and express varying degrees of urgency with respect to the population of caribou and also for the industry itself.

From your position, Monsieur Jetté, where do we find a balance for Canadian workers, for the Canadian economy and for the future of the forestry industry, which needs to protect the whole forest and not just the woods?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Pierre Jetté: I think a good part of the solution lies in the plants, in the industry. It has often been said that the industry needs to renew itself, for all kinds of reasons other than caribou.

The caribou situation is bringing us brutally close to the deadline, but in any case, changes have to be made. Let's take the opportunity to make those changes, to speed up those changes and to find a way forward that will both protect the caribou and, above all, ensure a future for this industry.

These changes require a modernization of the wood industry. As I was saying earlier, modernization must be done not only by investing more in high-value products, but also by trying to derive value from the very large quantities of wood that are not currently valued in Quebec. They aren't valued because they don't meet the needs of the current industry structure. This is an important point. I'll give you an example. In 2020, the Quebec government's National Wood Production Strategy indicated that, each year, 11 million cubic metres of hardwood is not used by the industry. Of course, this is across Quebec, but the strategy already called for the value chain to be adjusted to derive the most value out of this wood.

Isn't there a potential way of reassuring people? The anxiety is palpable, and it's important to listen to people. Can it be reduced, not by defending the status quo, but by looking to the future, which we hope would be sustainable?

● (1910)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you for that.

[*English*]

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have a little more than a minute.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've also heard on this committee from first nations leaders who, over 10 years ago, had to take the extraordinary steps to stop hunting caribou, a practice they had relied on since time immemorial. However, recognizing the decline in populations, that extraordinary step had to be taken.

I also want to acknowledge that a lot of first nations people living in Quebec are employed in the pulp, paper and lumber industries, so it presents a little bit of another challenge with respect to the term "balance". If we want to see caribou in 50 years and a forestry sector in 50 years, then change is necessary; some modifications to the current status quo are necessary. The officials who just left us said that the status quo will result in a further decline of the caribou populations.

I'd like to ask a question to—

The Chair: There's really no time for a question now.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Okay. I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry I went on so long.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'll now give the floor to my colleague Marilène Gill.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for being here, Mr. Jetté.

I'd also like to thank Ms. Dufour, Mr. Dufour and Mr. Dionne.

You know that I understand all of you. I'm a girl from the Côte-Nord.

I'd like to start with a personal comment. Ms. Dufour really touched me when she spoke of leaving her home and region. What she's going through now, I experienced it at another time and in a slightly different way. The father of my two oldest children worked at Sacopan. Then he worked for Kruger in Longue-Rive, on the Haute-Côte-Nord. When the sawmill closed, we moved to Baie-Comeau, with all the repercussions that implies for our lives, our families, and even the community.

Yes, I'm talking about myself, because I've experienced it to my core, but I'm also talking about the communities. We can't say that the municipality of Longue-Rive is back to what it was in the past. Many of our communities are single-industry towns, and I'm hearing some naive solutions here, which I don't like. You can't go 400 kilometres from home to work on wind turbines when you've always lived in a forestry community on the banks of the Saguenay. Port-Cartier is not Sacré-Coeur.

I must tell you that, on a number of occasions, I have asked Mr. Guilbeault to go and visit that community. That was long before Ms. Boulianne became mayor. Obviously, for me, a number of things are at stake, as I'm sure they are for you, the entire Boisaco team.

First, there is the issue of social peace, in addition to all the talk about our families. There is a lot of talk about first nations, but at the same time, I wonder if we're talking to all first nations. How often do we talk about their knowledge? I've been out in the field and spoken with their members. According to them, the caribou is moving east. We also have to look at the reality of first nations. The caribou aren't necessarily in the Pimpuacan reservoir area. They won't stay there either. Anthropogenic activity isn't limited to the forest industry; it includes recreation. In short, there are all kinds.

I, too, was at a loss yesterday when I read an article that said that, as far as Ontario is concerned, the federal government had an agreement with the Ford government for the industry. Funny, it sounds like a double standard. The federal government doesn't make any effort, unlike the Government of Quebec. You saw Blanchette Vézina, Champagne Jourdain, Ms. Laforest and Mr. Montigny. They went to see you, as did my team, to say that Quebec is there and that Quebec will help you. In fact, what the federal government is doing with Ontario is that it isn't asking for the same thing. That amazes me. I think the government needs to take that into account.

What also concerns me—and I'd like to hear your comments on this—is the extent to which Sacré-Coeur is a model. We're told that all trees, all species, all parts of the tree must be used, but Boisaco is already doing it, as Mr. Dufour said at the beginning of the meeting. Companies like Sacopan, Ripco and Granulco already use all the wood. There's nothing left that's not being used. What's more,

it's one of Boisaco's wishes—I think it was Mr. Dionne who mentioned it—to respect the environment and be a sustainable business.

I've been hearing prejudices here for a while. I'm hearing that your business isn't sustainable. I'm hearing that more needs to be done. However, you're already doing more than most businesses. What the government is going to do with this order is to say that there is a great model of sustainability for all businesses in Quebec, and even in Canada, but that it is still going to shut down the village. This is unacceptable. Thank you for being here to challenge this order. We want quick solutions. There's a lot of talk about caribou and quick fixes. I'd like to hear your comments on this too.

Ms. Dufour, you talked about anxiety. We're wondering what this order will do, but it's already having an impact. It's already destroying the industry back home and destroying villages. We'll certainly be with you. Sacré-Coeur won't be closing, but I would like to hear your comments on everything I've said, and I'd like you to round out my remarks. People need to hear realities other than just some of the prejudices and stereotypes we hear here in committee.

Ms. Dufour, Mr. Dufour and Mr. Dionne, take the rest of the time.

● (1915)

The Chair: There's a minute and a half left. If you can share that minute and a half, we'll stay on time.

Mr. Joyce Dionne: I'll give a comprehensive answer. What Boisaco cares about is the development of all its plants. Over the years, it's done nothing but that. We're now able to use 100% of the tree and derive value from all parts of it, so there's no waste. Not all plants can do that, and it's important to take that into account. There's no doubt that this announcement is causing a lot of anxiety for families right now, so it's important that it not take a year or two to find out what's going to happen.

I don't know if Mr. Dufour wants to add anything.

Mr. Joseph-Pierre Dufour: We get the impression that they want to punish a company that is a model for the industry. Maybe they don't want to punish us, but we're the ones who are suffering, in any case. It's a shame.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: You're being held hostage.

Mr. Joseph-Pierre Dufour: Yes, indeed. We, the local communities, feel that we are being held hostage by this order. We understand the desire to protect the species, but to come up with such a draconian protection plan—

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Boulerice.

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

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here with us, even if it is virtually, for this study, which is important to many people.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm also very touched to hear you talk about your stories and realities, which I know little about, unlike others, but about which I've been learning a lot over the past several weeks. These are extremely sensitive issues, and I fully understand that they're causing a great deal of concern and anxiety. We're going to try to find the right way to do what we need to do collectively, both for the protection of the environment and biodiversity, and for regional development and job retention.

Mr. Jetté, you said two important words: “fair transition”. Everyone is including a bit of what they want in that notion. I'm very proud of the work we've done, particularly with Charlie Angus, on a sustainable jobs bill, so that workers and unions have a place at the table.

You started talking about what the beginning of a fair transition and change in the industry might look like, in three points. The first thing you talked about was mitigation. I'd like to understand a little more about what you're talking about. Then I'll ask you some other questions.

● (1920)

Mr. Jean-Pierre Jetté: The industrial transition is under way, but we're not sure it's going to be fair. It's therefore important to consider the fate of the categories of workers who may be affected by changes. For a certain category of workers—and I'm thinking of forestry workers in particular—there is a package of options enabling them to continue working in their field. I was talking about silvicultural programs, for example, where these people could be used. When I gave the example of wind power, I was thinking of the megapark project in both regions, where there will be road construction to be done. It's things like that.

It should be noted that the other transition we seem to be witnessing, in other words, the consolidation of sawmills, will make volumes available. This is where the decision—to return to the word “fair”—becomes not just a business issue but a social one, too. With regard to the changes we're seeing, how can we help Sacré-Coeur? How can we help Saint-Ludger-de-Milot, a village in Lac-Saint-Jean where a plant has announced its closure?

It's not a matter of drawing up a transition plan and saying that we're going to focus on bioproducts in Canada. No. You have to know what's being done in Saint-Ludger-de-Milot, based on the wood you can find, which isn't necessarily fir or spruce, which is used to make two-by-fours. We have to find something else. We have money, technology and expertise. We have chemists who know these things. Can we put all that together and do everything we can to help villages like Saint-Ludger-de-Milot when we see that there's a social problem? That's a fair transition plan. It's a reasoned transition based on the interests of the communities, the workers.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I was surprised by the figure you quoted from a Quebec government report, namely that 11 million cubic metres of wood a year are underutilized or unused. You talked a lot about deriving value in this transition. Do you have any suggestions for the committee regarding this underutilized or unused wood?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Jetté: Right now, I see four sources. I gave you the example of hardwood that, for all kinds of reasons, don't have

the quality of wood required to meet the current structure. However, that doesn't mean that, with biochemistry, applications couldn't be found for them in bioproducts. I'm not an expert in this area, but I know there are cases where this is starting to happen. You have to do it by all means.

The second source is burnt wood; about 920,000 hectares of forest have been burnt. For the lumber industry, the ability to get that wood is very low, and after a year, the wood is no longer good. As a result, there are about 900,000 hectares of wood left. What can be done with it? With climate change, there will be more burnt wood. Wouldn't that be something to tap into?

Then, on the Côte-Nord, the industry is less interested in fir, which is dismissed because it doesn't meet the sawmill's needs. So what other needs can it meet?

The final source is construction waste, which currently ends up in landfills. Because it's made of wood, it emits methane, which is the worst way to produce greenhouse gases. In that case, can we think about creating a circular economy by recovering this material for other things, such as bioproducts and energy?

I'll leave it to the experts to decide, but, as you can see, there are possible solutions. We have to roll up our sleeves and help each other. We need to support the message we're hearing and, in my opinion, we have to give a message of hope. We have the technology to make that transition.

● (1925)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now begin the second and final round.

Mr. Martel.

Mr. Richard Martel: Is this the second and final round?

The Chair: Yes.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: It's two more times.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Martel is going to start the five-minute round.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: Okay. After this round, there's no more. That's what I wanted to know. That's where the confusion was. Thank you, Mr. Chair, that clarifies it.

Ms. Dufour, what I'm hearing is that, as a result of this order, the village of Sacré-Coeur may disappear. Did you have the minister's visit?

Ms. Valérie Dufour: I imagine you're talking to me about Minister Guilbeault.

Mr. Richard Martel: Yes, I'm referring to Minister Guilbeault, it's his order.

Ms. Valérie Dufour: No, we didn't have a visit from Mr. Guilbeault.

Mr. Richard Martel: Would you have liked to hear anything from him? As a human being, do you find the disappearance of the community quite tragic? How do you see this situation? Would you like him to at least see you and talk to you a bit?

Ms. Valérie Dufour: Yes, we would really have liked him visit us to see what is happening on the ground. This evening, I have told you a bit about what my family and I are dealing with, but I am speaking for all families in Sacré-Coeur. My family is not the only one dealing with this.

It is as though he issued an order based on his knowledge, of course, but without considering the human side, what we are experiencing, what our children are experiencing, what the people of Sacré-Coeur are experiencing. We are working, taking responsibility and earning a living in a dignified way. It feels like we have been brushed aside, without consulting us or considering our reality.

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you, Ms. Dufour.

Mr. Chair, I would like to introduce a motion.

The Chair: Okay, but first I want to clarify something. I think I understand your question about the rounds now. The second round—

[English]

Mr. Branden Leslie: I was ahead of him.

The Chair: I only heard him. I'm sorry.

Mr. Dan Mazier: You looked right at him.

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's who I heard first.

However, I just want to clarify something, Mr. Martel. The second round includes two chances for the Conservatives to speak. First it's you, and then I have you again. Perhaps that's what you thought about a third round, but it's not a third round; it's the second round, but you're on twice.

[Translation]

Okay?

Mr. Richard Martel: Yes. That means that we have another round. I have another one.

The Chair: In the second round, there are six turns, two for the Liberals, two for the Conservatives—

Mr. Richard Martel: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. You may continue with your motion.

Mr. Richard Martel: In light of the evidence I have heard at our most recent meetings, I would like to dedicate the following motion to the workers who are here with us. The motion is as follows:

Given that the Minister of Environment's proposed decree on the province of Quebec will:

- eliminate at least 1400 jobs, according to the analyses of Environment and Climate Change Canada;
- result in some Quebec communities being destroyed, such as Sacré-Coeur, with the Mayor saying the village "will pretty much become a ghost town";
- make housing even more expensive, while the Province of Quebec is already in the middle of a housing crisis caused by this Liberal government;
- is a direct attack on Quebec's areas of jurisdiction.

Therefore, the committee reports to the House its opposition to Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault's emergency decree, and urges the Government to immediately cancel its plan to impose this on Quebec.

• (1930)

The Chair: Perfect.

Mr. van Koeverden, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Martel, for the motion.

We would like some time to review it. Out of respect for the witnesses who have joined us here today and the time of day, which is quite late, I would ask that we quickly adjourn debate on this motion and move on to complete the meeting so that we can hear from our important witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll vote.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: We'd like time to read the motion.

Mr. Dan Mazier: You would like to adjourn debate. Is that the official motion?

The Chair: Well, let's just see. I think I sense a nuance there. He wants to adjourn debate. He wants to basically adjourn debate on this.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I would like to respect the witnesses.

The Chair: If the majority is with Mr. van Koeverden, then that's it; we move on. Okay, that's what I wanted to know.

Mr. Dan Mazier: What is the actual motion? What is he proposing?

The Chair: He's proposing to shut this down.

Mr. Dan Mazier: He is proposing to shut down the motion that—

The Chair: He's proposing to adjourn debate on the motion.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: It's a dilatory motion, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, that's right, and we're not debating it. He was asking for clarification. Yes, that's what it is.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: We go now to Mr. Longfield for five minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. I apologize for the interruption to our meeting.

I'm very interested in the sustainability of the lumber and forestry industry. I've worked in that industry myself out of Winnipeg, but also out of various plants in Ontario and up in Saguenay. I saw what happened to the paper industry when newspapers stopped being read. China took on cheap paper. The paper industry went to a better grade of paper to try to keep value in Canada. We definitely need to keep a healthy forestry industry in Canada.

Mr. Dionne, you mentioned the sustainability efforts. Since the 1970s, it's a different industry. The sustainability of the forestry industry is an example for all industries. You mentioned the commitment there. I'm not trying to trap you into a commitment, but I think it's important to set that baseline that we need to work together for a sustainable industry. You mentioned that animals and caribou come into this.

Could you maybe put some context to sustainability for us, as a committee, as we discuss this, Mr. Dionne?

[Translation]

Mr. Joyce Dionne: In terms of sustainability, everything improves over time. We were talking about hardwood earlier. For us, at Boisaco—

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Pardon me.

[English]

I don't have translation. I'm sorry to interrupt.

[Translation]

Mr. Joyce Dionne: Will that be interpreted?

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: My French isn't as good as Mr. van Koverden's, unfortunately. I grew up in Manitoba, and when I was in Abitibi, they asked, "Did you learn your French in Manitoba?" I said, "Yes, I did." It wasn't good French.

[Translation]

Mr. Joyce Dionne: Can I answer? Will it be interpreted?

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Yes, please. Thank you. That's very good.

[Translation]

The Chair: It's working now. You may continue, Mr. Dionne.

Mr. Joyce Dionne: In terms of sustainability, in the past, we were concerned about wood, but we didn't have the engineering we have now.

Let me give you an example of what we are doing at Boisaco. Boisaco also has a poplar processing plant. We do not want to waste hardwood. When we harvest poplar, there is also some birch. So we wanted to find a way not to waste the birch. Since this year, we have been making birch pellets. That is proof that anything can be done. We always try to be at the cutting edge.

• (1935)

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: That's great. I think, if I can say so, that you're ahead of Ontario, because Ontario still wastes a lot in the production process. Some mills could be financially viable if they found value in the chips on the ground and found the value in doing what you're doing to pivot.

The issue we're dealing with is a legal requirement that we have as a federal government. We're trying to get the Province of Quebec to the table because we can't operate without them in this agreement, and we're not getting return phone calls.

Could you help to maybe ask or say how important it is for the Province of Quebec to be involved? We have the indigenous communities and we have the businesses: We just don't have the province at the table.

[Translation]

Mr. Joyce Dionne: I don't want to speak for the Quebec government, but I know it has done a lot of work in recent years and is also concerned about boreal caribou. I don't know why the federal government and Quebec no longer communicate on this issue. I do know, however, that the Quebec government has the knowledge to find common ground on all of this. I do not want to speak for it though, and I don't want to get into it.

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I know. I wish I could get an insight, and I agree.

The herds are different in British Columbia and they're different in Ontario. Quebec has its own particular issues that we've got lots of testimony on.

It's just really important, first of all, that as a federal government, we want you to succeed. We need a strong forestry sector. The sector is doing remarkable jobs on conservation, but we need to also protect biodiversity of the animals in the forests, and for that we need to have the province at the table.

I'll turn my time back unless there are any other comments from anybody else.

Mr. Jetté or Mr. Dufour, would you comment?

[Translation]

Mr. Joseph-Pierre Dufour: I don't think the Quebec government was idle in terms of protecting caribou. I think it was perhaps still too early to assess the effectiveness of the measures it had already taken.

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Right, and they are the partner on this particular agreement. We just need to get them to the table with all the rest of us.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Next is Madame Puzé.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Puzé: I will give my speaking time to my colleague Marilène Gill.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for Mr. Dionne, who may not have completely finished, and for Mr. Dufour—

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Right.

Mr. Dufour and Mr. Dionne, since I spoke at length earlier, I would like to give you the chance to talk. If you could tell Minister Guilbeault what has to be done, what would you say to him? I will of course invite him once again to visit us to see what is happening on the ground.

Mr. Joseph-Pierre Dufour: Certainly, the threat of an emergency order from the Canadian government to protect the caribou may force the Quebec government to implement additional measures. However, is it reasonable to hold our entire community hostage? We feel like the real victims who may bear the brunt of a squabble between two levels of government.

Mr. Joyce Dionne: I'm asking Minister Guilbeault to suspend his order. His order creates total terror. Fear can't solve much in conflicts. Instead of focusing on solutions, people are afraid. They just focus on their fear. We must try to find common ground and show that there are alternatives to closing Sacré-Coeur for the survival of the caribou. I'm sure that there are alternatives. Those are my thoughts.

• (1940)

Mr. Joseph-Pierre Dufour: It creates chaos among the public. We can feel the tension in the communities. We've never experienced anything of this nature in our part of the Haute-Côte-Nord. It's unbelievable.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Ms. Dufour, to wrap things up, what are your thoughts on the double standard with Ontario?

Ms. Valérie Dufour: Mr. Jetté was talking earlier about harvest-burnt wood. Yes, we harvest burnt wood with the support of the Quebec government. There are special plans for this. The Boisaco group has already participated in these types of plans. Our Boisaco group companies, Bersaco and Valibois, also harvest some hardwood. We're working hard and we've taken charge as a company. This isn't just a job for us. We're stakeholders in these companies.

The Chair: That's fine.

Ms. Valérie Dufour: It seems that we aren't being listened to and that our situation isn't being taken into account.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll now turn to Mr. Boulerice.

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

I find today's testimonies on an extremely complex issue quite compelling. I'm sorry for the fear that communities such as Sacré-Coeur are currently facing. It must be quite awful. We must address a number of factors as well, including the federal government's obligation regarding species at risk. We can't just ignore the situation and say that we won't do anything. We also can't try to do everything at once. That's the challenge on our side of the fence.

Speaking of fences, Mr. Winfield, from the Canadian Wildlife Service, was talking to us earlier about pens. These pens are used as a temporary measure to protect the three really endangered herds. One of his comments really struck me. We can't release these animals completely into the wild because they have nowhere else to go. Other witnesses have also spoken about this. Mr. Jetté, in terms of land-use planning and habitat protection or redevelopment that would one day give these animals a place to go, isn't there also some potential for job creation?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Jetté: Are you talking about reforestation?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Yes, reforestation.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Jetté: With a few exceptions, such as forest fires that cause regeneration issues, forests generally regenerate fairly well. The issue is time. It takes a long time. If we don't ease the logging pressure on the caribou habitat, they won't have anywhere to go in the meantime. We can plant trees, and we already do so. However, it isn't the same category of worker.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: It isn't a miracle solution.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Jetté: I'm not against the idea. However, in terms of a fair transition plan, it isn't the best approach. It's important to take into account the categories of workers involved. Other mitigation options may be available in the medium term. For example, if we could establish—

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Jetté, but I must stop you there. The two and a half minutes are up.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Jetté: I had another idea.

The Chair: Mr. Martel, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

Mr. Dufour, Ms. Dufour and Mr. Dionne, who gave you your passion for forestry? Was it your parents? Why are you so attached to this industry?

Mr. Joseph-Pierre Dufour: In my case, I've worked in other industries and other regions, including major centres. I left for a few years, but I was attached to my region. I was born here, in Les Bergeronnes. I came back to my natural habitat.

• (1945)

Mr. Richard Martel: Does anyone else want to comment?

Ms. Valérie Dufour: My grandfather and father were both part of Samoco, so it was handed down from generation to generation. I still ventured further afield, but my love for the forest and our village was quickly rekindled. You must live in a village to understand how it feels. From Monday to Friday, our neighbours are our colleagues, and on Saturdays, they're our friends. The forest is part of us. We spend the week in the forest. To relax on weekends, we go fishing or off-roading. It's part of us.

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you.

I'll give the rest of my time to my colleague.

[English]

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

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To the witnesses, I am obviously not from Quebec, but when I ran for politics last year, the main thing I ran on was protecting our rural way of life. I feel an incredible kinship with our witnesses today, as they are defending their own way of life, it seems to me, while having an “Ottawa knows best” government running roughshod not only over their livelihoods, but over their entire community. I appreciate your very passionate and personal testimony today.

During the conversation with Minister Guilbeault a couple of hours ago, I noticed that in response to MP Chatel, he said that when workers come here to committee, the Conservatives ignore what they say. We are not ignoring you. We hear you.

My colleague Mr. Martel has been doing a fantastic job of defending not only the rights of his riding but also the important work the forestry sector and forestry workers do across Quebec and, in turn, across all of Canada. During his conversation with the mayor of Sacré-Coeur, he asked her what would happen if this order were enacted, and she suggested the region would “become a ghost town.” Minister Guilbeault replied today during our conversation that it was curious, because it was not the message the workers gave him when he met with them.

To close out this meeting, I would like to have Mr. Dufour, Ms. Dufour and Mr. Dionne each give their assessment of the workers' view. Are they terrified that their livelihoods and communities are about to be ruined, or are they in fact okay with this Ottawa imposition and the impact it's going to have on their livelihoods?

I'll start with Mr. Dionne.

[Translation]

Mr. Joseph-Pierre Dufour: To give you an example, it reminds me of what happened in Lebel-sur-Quévillon in 2000. A similar situation could happen.

Mr. Joyce Dionne: Certainly, some workers are terrified. We hear them and we listen to them. We're with them all the time and we're experiencing what they're going through. However, they're so passionate about the forest that they'll stick around. They support us all the way and they won't give up. Boisaco's workers certainly won't give up. They're ready. This is their life. It's important to get organized so that everyone can continue to live as they choose, while respecting everyone else.

[English]

Mr. Branden Leslie: I'll let you close it out, Ms. Dufour.

[Translation]

Ms. Valérie Dufour: As I said at the start of the meeting, the people of Sacré-Coeur are passionate. Sacré-Coeur is our habitat, our environment and our forest. It's part of us. Yes, we're anxious. We know that, if the order is implemented, we'll be forced into exile. We don't want that. We love the forest and our village. We want to stay in our area.

The Chair: Thank you.

To wrap up this three-hour meeting, I'll give the floor to Ms. Chatel.

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

I want to thank the witnesses.

Your comments today are echoed in my own backyard. There are rural communities in my constituency. In the northern Outaouais region, you may be familiar with the Gatineau Valley and Maniwaki. We have Louisiana-Pacific Canada Ltd. and Resolute Forest Products.

A number of families, like you, have been affected by this fear. Access to fibre is a major issue in forestry. Workers and forestry companies have been making heartfelt pleas at committee meetings for us to work together.

Ms. Dufour, I see you. Your heartfelt plea is for all levels of government, industries and workers to join forces, because solutions exist.

I've seen in committee how the Conservatives aren't listening to workers and their heartfelt pleas. They don't want to work together. They want to create division among us. You and our constituents are saying that we need to sit down together and find solutions.

All the witnesses told us something that we confirmed with the minister earlier. We're missing a key player in the effort to save both the economy and the ecology, which we can do. When we work together, we can innovate and find solutions. We're missing Quebec, which isn't at the table to help find solutions. This is my heartfelt plea. We must ask Quebec to join the effort, to sit down with the federal government and to find solutions for Sacré-Coeur, for Boisaco and for the future. You have three children and I know many families. We also want jobs for our children. We don't want them to leave our regions. We want them to have the opportunity to work in forestry too.

Ms. Dufour, can you tell us about your hope that governments and political parties will work together to find a solution for you?

● (1950)

Ms. Valérie Dufour: I think that Boisaco and the village of Sacré-Coeur are the finest example of everyone working together. We have the harvesters, the mill workers, the administration, Ripco and Granulco. Together, we've managed to find solutions to take all the resources from the tree and avoid any losses.

Boisaco helps Sacré-Coeur and gives back to the community. It may be on a smaller scale than governments. However, Boisaco and Sacré-Coeur have achieved a great deal in 40 years. I would like everyone to see what Sacré-Coeur and Boisaco are all about. I would like everyone to see how much the Boisaco group means to our village and how proud every employee feels to work for Boisaco. I would like every elected official to see this and learn from this example. If everyone were to follow this example, it would be possible come up with a solution that makes sense.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Ms. Dufour, you just said something important. I think that you're teaching both the Conservatives and the Quebec government something. We need to work together, as the community is doing, to really come up with innovative solutions. When we work together, solutions emerge and these solutions will benefit your community.

You have the caribou issue. Here, it's another matter. The forest issue is widespread. We need to rethink the forest.

Mr. Jetté, you were talking about this. You give us hope. We must work together to rethink the forest in a sustainable way and to ensure that the children in my constituency and the indigenous

communities and Ms. Dufour's children can also have the chance to work in this industry. Can you elaborate on this briefly?

The Chair: Unfortunately, Mr. Jetté, we're out of time. I apologize.

I want to thank the witnesses for taking the time to share their perspectives and life experiences with us.

On that note, we must adjourn the meeting.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: I have just a quick question about the next steps here. Are we going to the study—

● (1955)

The Chair: We'll discuss that on Monday. We have about half an hour for future business.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I wish you all a good evening. See you next time.

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