



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 139

Wednesday, December 11, 2024

Chair: Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia



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• (1630)

[*Translation*]

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

First of all, I'd like to inform you that the sound tests have been successfully completed.

Before we begin, I would like to seek the committee's unanimous consent to adopt the budget for the preliminary examination of Bill C-73.

Is anyone opposed to adopting this budget?

Seeing no dissent, the budget is adopted.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Are we going to have a meeting on Monday and a meeting on Wednesday?

The Chair: There will be no meeting on Wednesday, but there will be one on Monday.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Can you remind me what we're going to be discussing?

The Chair: We're going to talk about instructions to give to the analysts regarding the report on sustainable finance, among other things. There will probably be motions brought forward at the meeting. We want to close the loop before the holidays.

Ms. Collins, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to confirm the following. I know that we have a meeting scheduled for Monday. I was going to propose a unanimous consent motion today to add an extra 15 minutes so that we could tackle a motion that I'd like to table on the net-zero accelerator, but if we are meeting on Monday and we have your commitment that you won't cancel this meeting, I'm comfortable doing it later. I just want to get that confirmation.

The Chair: In answer to Madame Chatel, I said that, yes, we're having a meeting. I said that it would be to give drafting instructions to the analysts for the sustainable finance report but that, probably, we will also be entertaining motions. I think that covers your concerns.

Ms. Laurel Collins: That's wonderful. So, we'll have an opportunity in that meeting to talk about the motions. That sounds great.

The Chair: Yes. People can move their motions. We'll have time for that for sure.

Okay, is there anything else? No.

Today we are dealing once again with Bill C-73. We're doing a prestudy of the bill before it arrives in committee. We have two panels.

The first panel includes the David Suzuki Foundation, the Manitoba Wildlife Federation, the West Coast Environmental Law Association, and Ecojustice.

We'll start with the David Suzuki Foundation.

I believe, Ms. Gue and Ms. Plotkin, you'll be sharing your five minutes.

Ms. Lisa Gue (Manager, National Policy, David Suzuki Foundation): That's right. Thank you.

Good afternoon. The David Suzuki Foundation appreciates the invitation to appear today, and I'm sorry I can't be there in person.

My name is Lisa Gue. I'm the national policy manager at the DSF, and I'm joined in the room by my colleague, Rachel Plotkin, boreal project manager.

I'll briefly speak to three points, and then I'll hand it off to Rachel to complete our opening statement.

First, thank you for initiating this prestudy. When Bill C-73 was introduced in June, we called on Parliament to prioritize it on the fall legislative agenda. By this time, we had hoped to see it referred to committee and reported with strengthening amendments. Instead, the fall came and went, and the bill has yet to even be called for debate. We're very concerned that this important legislation has stalled, and we encourage the committee to continue this prestudy after the break so that you can move quickly to amendments if and, hopefully, when the bill is finally referred. We also implore all of you to work with your parliamentary colleagues to find a path to enable the second reading debate and vote on Bill C-73 as soon as possible in the new year.

My second point is that there has long been broad support from across the political spectrum for Canada's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney signed the convention for Canada in 1992. Later, the global 2020 targets were agreed to under the Harper government. While the current government deserves credit for Canada's convening role at COP15 in Montreal where the new 2030 targets were negotiated, they didn't stand alone. I know some of you were there, too. It would be appropriate and a powerful statement if Bill C-73 and amendments to strengthen it were supported by all parties, a team Canada approach to the biodiversity crisis.

My third point is that bold targets and accountability legislation are no panacea, and this bill is not a substitute for the many other things that need to be done to halt and reverse nature loss. However, a legislative framework for planning, reporting on implementation and results and continuous improvement is essential to keep progress on track. It will also improve predictability and transparency.

I will leave the remainder of our time to Rachel to speak about why the 2030 nature targets matter.

• (1635)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Plotkin.

Ms. Rachel Plotkin (Boreal Project Manager, David Suzuki Foundation): Good afternoon.

As Lisa said, my name is Rachel Plotkin. I'm the boreal project manager at the David Suzuki Foundation, where I work to protect species at risk and maintain and restore healthy forest ecosystems.

I'm going to follow Lisa's lead with three points of my own, which are set in the context of forest biodiversity.

The first is that the current suite of policy and regulatory tools intended to protect biodiversity is not working. This is primarily due to the fact that Canada's approach to protecting nature has often operated with a mitigation framework, which makes sense as an approach in the fight against climate change, but it has driven the loss of biodiversity. Under it, protected areas are safe—well, to some extent—from the impacts of resource extraction and development, but outside of protected areas, which is over 70% of the land and water in Canada, harm to nature is continually approved, even if it is mitigated or made less bad. This leads to ongoing habitat loss and fragmentation and is what we call death by a thousand cuts.

An example of how this plays out is boreal woodland caribou, which are threatened with extinction in almost every province and territory in Canada due primarily to habitat fragmentation caused by forestry and oil and gas extraction activities.

The second point is that change can only come about with a strong road map outlining how to achieve it. In order to maintain and restore nature, we must develop more effective tools that create limits to the footprint of resource extraction and development activities and clearly demarcate areas of ecological importance. Canada's new nature strategy, which outlines steps to identify degraded areas, support indigenous leadership and assess priority areas for restoration, is a start, but it needs legislative backing.

My third point is that an effective nature accountability law will bring greater certainty and transparency, which can reward progressive forestry practices in the global marketplace. Clear objectives and mechanisms for reporting on them can help create confidence in both investors and consumers, which is critically important in industries such as forestry.

The global stocktake decision, signed by 193 countries last year at COP28 in Dubai, includes a 2030 deadline for halting and reversing deforestation and land degradation. Additionally, the EU has adopted a deforestation regulation prohibiting trade tied to deforestation and forest degradation. This means preventing forest degradation is critical to the success of the Canadian forestry industry in the global forum.

In Canada, we're still largely stuck in the mitigation framework, limiting damage on a site-by-site basis while overall forest degradation remains the trend. The maintenance and restoration of biodiversity are this generation's collective responsibility. If we are to achieve it, we need a road map to get there with targets, timelines, policies and clearly identified leaders because despite good intentions, our stumbling to date has been grossly insufficient to halt and reverse the loss of nature.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Plotkin.

We'll go now to the Manitoba Wildlife Federation. We have with us Chris Heald, senior policy adviser.

Go ahead, Mr. Heald, with your opening statement.

Mr. Chris Heald (Senior Policy Advisor, Manitoba Wildlife Federation): Thank you for the opportunity to be a witness.

To start, I'll provide a bit of background. The Manitoba Wildlife Federation is the oldest and largest conservation organization in Manitoba. We are over 80 years old and represent conservationists, hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts. Our members are from all walks of life and of all ethnicities.

Our membership shares a deep passion for the protection of our environment and believes strongly that all of our country's resources are shared resources. It doesn't matter what those resources are, be they water, trees, wildlife, minerals or fish; they belong to all Canadians, regardless of economic stature and ethnicity. We are also adamant that these precious resources must be managed and harvested in a sustainable manner.

That's a bit of background.

Moving to my specific comments on Bill C-73, we feel strongly that the federal government is implementing UN-driven environmental targets, which were committed to without consultation with the provinces, landowners and resource users who manage and enjoy these public spaces. We believe this bill provides the minister with a blank cheque to implement changes without any further parliamentary oversight. We feel this bill uses words of symbolism that sound great on paper but fall short on details and are devoid of measurable outcomes.

We feel this bill has the federal government overreaching into provincial jurisdiction. This bill talks about collaboration numerous times, but in fact, it provides the federal minister with wide discretion to consult—or not, if he so chooses—with the provinces, municipal governments, private landowners and resource users, including hunters and anglers.

This bill closely mirrors other federal government United Nations initiatives, like the indigenous protected areas and ecological corridors. It provides the authority for a large-scale set-aside of public lands, which are our country's shared resources, a delegation of control and management of access to Crown lands to unelected management authorities.

A Manitoba-specific example of what I've just described is the federal government pushing the IPAs and ecological corridors without consultation with landowners, the provincial government, municipal governments or grassroots organizations like ours.

With the IPAs, we've seen the federal government deputize Parks Canada to begin the implementation of the Seal River indigenous protected area in northern Manitoba. This large tract of Crown land consists of an area the size of the province of Nova Scotia. This IPA is the first of nine proposed for Manitoba and has received initial federal funding from the \$600-million federal allotment.

The implementation of this IPA and the ecological corridors designed to connect the IPAs are being forced through without proper consultation, and they do not have widespread support as stated. Common sense would dictate that these initiatives are bound to fail in meeting their goals without the full consultation of all invested stakeholders.

How can we, as a society, consider restricting access to Crown resources and implement management practices on private land without including the farmers, the hunters and the anglers who live in these areas and who are the true champions in protecting our precious natural resources?

We urge this committee and the federal government to rethink this top-down, UN-driven approach, stop delegating control over these lands to unelected management boards and develop a made-in-Canada approach that engages input from all provinces and all Canadians, who cherish our outdoor spaces.

Thank you.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Heald.

We'll go now to West Coast Environmental Law and staff lawyer Anna Johnston.

Ms. Anna Johnston (Staff Lawyer, West Coast Environmental Law Association): Good afternoon. Many thanks to the chair and to the members of this committee for inviting me to come and speak about this important bill.

I am a staff lawyer at West Coast Environmental Law, where my expertise focuses on constitutional law, biodiversity, climate and impact assessment law. I've been working closely on Bill C-73 with my colleagues Josh Ginsberg and Stephen Hazell from Ecojustice and Greenpeace, who are also appearing before you today.

We've submitted a joint brief recommending proposed amendments, and we've divided up our speaking notes so that we can be most efficient and effective for you this evening.

I'm going to focus my remarks on why we and nature need a strong nature accountability law.

I was deeply involved in the development and implementation of the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act, which I like to call CNZEAA after its acronym, and have first-hand experience in how accountability legislation can help drive government ambition and transparency in setting and meeting nature targets and environmental targets.

My remarks are based primarily on what we've learned from CNZEAA and that we can apply to Bill C-73.

Put simply, as it has with climate, Canada has a long history of talking a big talk on nature and then failing to walk the walk.

We've been a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity, or the CBD, since 1993, and as required by the convention, in 1995 we published a national biodiversity strategy that set out a framework for protecting nature.

In 2010, we agreed to the Aichi targets, a set of five strategic goals and 20 targets aimed at addressing challenges in the implementation of the CBD.

We also have a federal sustainable development strategy that includes goals like protecting and recovering species and conserving biodiversity, and myriad laws aimed at protecting nature, like the Species at Risk Act, the Fisheries Act and the Migratory Birds Convention Act.

And yet, as our colleagues from the David Suzuki Foundation pointed out, our biodiversity is in a free fall. Species continue to decline at alarming rates, habitat continues to degrade and fragment and invasive species and pollution continue to accumulate, with climate change exacerbating these harms.

I would argue that a lack of accountability for setting and meeting nature goals is why Canada's biodiversity has declined at this rate despite all of our international and domestic laws and instruments.

While the CBD requires Canada to submit national biodiversity plans and progress reports, there's nothing actually preventing it from producing glossy brochures instead of detailed and credible documents.

What the Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act has taught us is that accountability legislation can help drive ambition in setting domestic targets, make plans for meeting those targets credible and ensure honest reporting on progress.

Before CNZEAA was enacted, Canada's 2030 climate target was 30%, which was far below what experts said was Canada's obligation under the Paris Agreement, and its climate plan lacked any kind of details that would be necessary to know if we were going to meet even that weak target.

After CNZEAA came into force, the government set a more ambitious target of 40% to 45% and established a new and more detailed plan for how it would achieve those reductions. Last December, its first progress report showed that since the act has been enacted, we have increased our ambition and are more closely on track to meeting our climate goals.

Bill C-73 could help do the same for nature, but not, unfortunately, as it's currently drafted. It is so light on detail that it more closely resembles one of those glossy brochures that we're trying to avoid than true accountability legislation.

To live up to its promise, we think that Bill C-73 needs to do six things.

First, it needs to require the minister to set national nature targets so that we know what direction we're trying to go.

Second, it also needs to be more prescriptive about the contents of plans and reports so that we have a road map for meeting those targets and honesty about whether we're on course.

Third, it needs to ensure that the nature advisory committee has the mandate, expertise and resources it needs to provide independent advice.

Fourth, it should enshrine a biodiversity shield so that federal decisions don't undermine our ability to meet our nature targets.

Fifth, it should require periodic reviews by the sustainability commissioner.

Finally, sixth, it should ensure respect for indigenous rights, knowledge and law in all steps and decisions taken under it.

• (1645)

I'll conclude my remarks there. I would be happy to answer any questions, and, as I mentioned, my colleagues Josh Ginsberg and Stephen Hazell will go into more details on these recommendations.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Johnston.

We go now to Joshua Ginsberg from Ecojustice.

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg (Director, Ecojustice Environmental Law Clinic, Ecojustice): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for initiating the pre-study of this important piece of legislation, and thank you also for the invitation to appear before you today to discuss our proposals to improve Bill C-73. I'm a lawyer at Ecojustice, and I also direct the environmental law clinical law program at the University of Ottawa. I specialize in constitutional, administrative and environmental law.

Bill C-73 is welcome progress for nature. Canada contains a huge part of the natural world, which we are responsible for safeguarding. It has approximately 24% of the world's boreal forests and about 25% of the world's temperate forests. Its 1.5 million square kilometres of wetlands make up about 25% of the entire world's total. Canada also has the world's longest coastline, two million lakes and the third-largest area of glaciers in the world. All of that is facing decline at rates unprecedented in human history.

Canada needs a national law to coordinate and implement its commitments to halt and reverse nature loss, which were made at the landmark global meeting in Montreal in 2022. I am concerned, however, that the nature accountability act, as presently drafted, is weaker than its counterparts in other jurisdictions, notably the United Kingdom, and even weaker than its companion legislation in Canada concerning climate, which is the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act.

Unlike those two laws, the NAA, as currently drafted, does not require that the government set any target or end goal for biodiversity. There is no clear purpose in the law for the planning and the reporting that it requires. It's kind of like outfitting a ship for an ocean voyage but not setting a destination. You're likely to get lost or go in circles.

With amendments to strengthen it, though, the NAA would help Canada chart a course to harmony with nature by 2050. Our proposed amendments would strengthen the NAA by directing the government to set national targets for nature and make detailed plans to meet them. This is very much like the U.K. legislation, which incorporates goals and targets directly into its regulations, including targets to reduce the risk of extinction and restore and create wildlife-rich habitats. The targets there are accompanied by detailed reporting obligations to ensure accountability.

National targets are required for laws like this one that implement global commitments, like the Paris Agreement for climate and the global biodiversity framework agreed in Montreal, and that's for two reasons.

First, Canada has a dualist system, which means that international agreements have no force here until Parliament—you—says they do. A law means that Canada has an obligation to act, and also shows the world that we are serious about our nature commitments.

Second, these agreements set a broad global ambition, with each country left autonomously to determine what they will do within their own borders to contribute. Specifying those contributions in law makes government accountable for achieving them, so these targets are very much in response to the commitments we've made internationally, but they are a made-in-Canada approach.

We have not met past nature commitments. The lack of a legal basis for those commitments was a key reason for that. The independent auditor found that the reason for failure was a lack of strong national leadership, including an integrated national approach that coordinates actions, tracks progress and makes the required corrections, and that is what the NAA, with our suggested amendments, would accomplish.

I want to say one word about jurisdiction, because it was raised already by my fellow panellist here.

The federal government has an important role in protecting nature, and so do provinces and indigenous nations. The jurisdiction of all governments must be respected, and they must be enabled to do everything within their power to protect the natural world.

It's for that reason that our proposed definition of national targets distinguishes between targets that are within federal jurisdiction to achieve and targets that are national in nature and that the federal government would necessarily seek to co-operate on with provinces, territories and indigenous peoples, and we emphasize that indigenous rights and jurisdiction must be respected and prioritized in target-setting.

• (1650)

In the brief accompanying our remarks, we've provided for you detailed suggestions for amendments to enable target setting, to improve reporting requirements so that the public gets a full picture of the progress being made towards those targets, and to ensure independent oversight and a whole-of-government approach to nature.

I will be very happy to answer any questions about those suggestions.

Let me close by saying that we, again, thank the committee for this important work. We urge it to support Bill C-73 and to endorse our amendments to make it even more effective.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to questions.

Mr. Leslie, you have six minutes.

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

I'd like to start with a fairly straightforward yes-or-no questions. I'll go from right to left because I'd like to hear all your views on this.

Recently, Minister Guilbeault was sitting in one of those very chairs, and he gave himself a very aggressive pat on the back for achieving Climate Scorecard's 2024 Government Climate Leadership Award. You were all, frankly, very critical of his achievements as a minister and of the achievements of this government. Do you believe that the government is living up to the promises it has made and is, in fact, achieving the results it has promised Canadians in biodiversity-loss reduction and emissions reduction?

I'll start with Ms. Johnston and then go across.

• (1655)

Ms. Anna Johnston: You're starting with the easy questions, eh?

I think this government has made admirable progress on the environment in general, specifically with regard to climate.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Mostly that's hopeful.

Thank you, though.

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: Thank you for the question.

No government of any stripe has fully met any biodiversity targets it has committed to. That's why we do applaud the government for bringing forward this bill—

Mr. Branden Leslie: Give me a yes or a no.

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: I'm sorry....

Mr. Chris Heald: Is all I can say “no” or “yes”? Do I not get to elaborate?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Milton, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Expert witnesses come to this committee to provide their expertise, not to be directed as to how to answer questions.

Mr. Branden Leslie: It's my time, Adam.

The Chair: This is Mr. Leslie's time.

I would say to the witnesses that they're under no obligation to give a binary answer. Sometimes things are very complex.

Anyway, it's Mr. Leslie's right to ask you to answer with a yes or a no, but you are under no obligation to do that.

Mr. Chris Heald: I'm going to elaborate, then, if I'm under no obligation.

The Chair: Well, I mean, if Mr. Leslie doesn't want you to elaborate and wants to ask another question, then it's his time, as well.

Mr. Chris Heald: Okay.

The Chair: We'll go back. I'll set the....

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): How much time does he have left?

The Chair: He has four and a half minutes.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you.

Mr. Chris Heald: My answer is no. I actually believe that the path it's on is going to create further division and the net loss is going to increase. What we're seeing on the landscape is....

I'm sorry? I've been cut off again.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: I want to give equal opportunity here.

Ms. Plotkin.

Ms. Rachel Plotkin: I would say that it's taking steps, but it's a complicated political landscape, working with the provinces and with all the different parties.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: Thank you.

Mr. Heald, you mentioned the words “blank cheque”, which I find to be fairly accurate, particularly in terms of whom the minister—in this case, Minister Guilbeault—can appoint to the advisory panel when making some of these biodiversity decisions. To me, this is quite concerning because who you put on that advisory board actually really matters.

You've read the legislation, I assume. Are anglers mentioned in it?

Mr. Chris Heald: No, sir.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: Are hunters mentioned in it?

Mr. Chris Heald: No, sir.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: Are farmers?

Mr. Chris Heald: No, sir.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: Are landowners, broadly speaking?

Mr. Chris Heald: No, sir.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: Are trappers?

Mr. Chris Heald: No, sir.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: What an odd neglect of a whole bunch of people who live, work and play on the land. Who do you think might be put on this board?

Mr. Chris Heald: It's incredible. Our organization is 80 years old. We're doing biodiversity pilot projects in our province, and we don't know about any of these projects that are coming down, these bills. We're learning about it second-hand and third-hand. That's why you're on the wrong path. With regard to the way this is going, we're on the wrong path.

We exclude landowners. We exclude hunters and anglers. You're going to create that division, and it's not going to work.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: Do you think that was on purpose?

Mr. Chris Heald: I think it was, 100%.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: I agree. I don't trust this minister, and I think it's very intentional that he is excluding the people who literally live, work and play on the land, the people I represent here. It's appalling. It goes to show the type of decision-making and how it comes to be.

The attempt here, at the end of the day, is to carve off 30% of the land mass in Canada, which will prevent existing private landowners, hunters and anglers from having the access necessary to participate in these traditional heritage activities, which obviously you, as

the Manitoba Wildlife Federation, represent. How do we make sure that the understanding of the land and the understanding of those folks are represented and respected in this legislation?

Mr. Chris Heald: They have to be part of the legislation, they have to be legislated to be part of it and everybody has to be at the table. You can't divide based on ethnicity, stature or geographic areas; everybody should be at the table when these bills are being created.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: What would your perspective be? If you could explain it to me, how do the people you represent view biodiversity, and what do they do to enhance it?

Mr. Chris Heald: They're passionate about it. I live on 20 acres and manage it for biodiversity. We are running pilot projects trying to create where management areas have been set aside with no management techniques, and we're seeing the biodiversity loss because there's no more management, no more controlled burning and no more grazing, so there is another train of thought.

You can't just set aside large tracts of land and expect biodiversity to happen on its own. It needs to be managed. You have to replicate fires. You have to replicate grazing. You need those disturbances on the landscape to have biodiversity.

Our organizations are on a much different track than how we're being represented.

• (1700)

Mr. Brandon Leslie: No, that sounds like the viewpoint of somebody who actually lives, works and plays on land, not in an ivory tower law office. If we gave you a million dollars to enhance biodiversity, how would you spend it versus how I think others might?

Mr. Chris Heald: You have to meet with the landowners, first of all. You can't make decisions in Ottawa or Geneva or somewhere else without speaking to the landowners. The landowners are the true stewards; they're there every single day. Hunters and anglers are on the landscape every single day, and they see biodiversity loss. They're the greatest protectors of nature.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: Here is one of the things that really bothered me when this government came into power in 2015. I used to work for a fellow named Robert Sopuck, one of the strongest, most passionate conservationists in the country. I would say he single-handedly saved more fish through his development of the recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program, which I assume your members or individuals took part in—

Mr. Chris Heald: Yes.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: —and it was cancelled.

Could you explain to me your understanding of the program?

The Chair: We're out of time, unfortunately, but yes, Mr. Sopuck was a good MP.

We'll go now to Mr. Ali.

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My question is for Mr. Ginsberg.

Halting and reversing biodiversity loss is one of the great challenges of our time, but if we get it right, the transition to a nature-positive Canada will have profoundly positive impacts on our collective well-being, economic prosperity and quality of life now and into the future.

Can you tell the members why Bill C-73 is crucial? Why must it pass?

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: It is absolutely crucial that if we are aiming for the end state you describe, which I completely agree with, we have to carefully plan and make sure we understand the steps to get there.

In the past, we have not done that, and while individual progress may have been helpful, we have not planned broadly or coherently to achieve our desired end state. That's why we need what I have described as a made-in-Canada plan respecting and implementing our international agreements, but adapting them for the Canadian scene.

Let me say in response to the exchange with my co-panellists here, just to make sure we're not creating division where none exist, I don't say and none of our agreements say that conservation and that end state you described preclude the kinds of activities that the members of my co-panellist group here enjoy and promote. In fact, I think those people should be at the table; nothing in the bill precludes that, and that's part of what a made-in-Canada approach means.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

I have a follow-up question.

This bill is currently at second reading in the House of Commons. Do you think this bill should be expedited in the House of Commons at second reading?

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: Absolutely; nature cannot wait.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Anna Johnston.

Bill C-73 is also known to be a sister bill to the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act, or Bill C-12. Showing transparency to Canadians and holding government to account is important. Why does Canada need a nature accountability act?

Ms. Anna Johnston: One of the barriers to effective biodiversity protection in Canada has been.... I mentioned all of these international instruments that we're a party to and the myriad of federal laws, programs and regulations, but there's no one unifying place where we can see whether and how they're working together, and then what gaps there are. An effective Bill C-73, or nature accountability law, would be that place.

Once we get that detail fleshed out for what has to be in national biodiversity strategies and action plans, we'll be able to have a comprehensive picture of what we have in place to protect nature and what the main drivers are of biodiversity loss that we have to contend with. Like I said, what are the gaps that need to be filled? We have all of these different fragments, but right now, we don't have that one holding place to see how they're all working together and whether we need additional resources to protect nature.

That's really what we see this bill being able to do.

• (1705)

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: I'd like to hear from both of you on Canada's nature strategy, which was released in June 2024.

Can you tell us about it? How does it tie in with this bill, and why is it so important?

Ms. Anna Johnston: Under the Convention on Biological Diversity, as it would be prescribed by Bill C-73, the federal government has to produce biodiversity strategies and action plans. What we've seen lacking to date is enough detail on those strategies and plans to actually provide us with, as I called it earlier, the "road map" that we need.

The 2030 nature strategy is much more detailed in terms of a strategy, but you'll notice in the title that it's just the 2030 nature strategy. We don't yet have the accompanying action plan. What I see our proposed amendments doing, since they prescribe the actual contents of strategies and plans, is requiring the federal government to build on this fairly strong 2030 strategy to come up with the action plan for how we're actually going to put that strategy into action.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

Did you want to add something?

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: Thank you.

I'll just add that the government strategy around the international targets recognizes the key drivers of biodiversity loss, the scale and urgency of the crisis in Canada and the need for transformative change and a whole-of-government approach. We would like to see those drivers put into law so that we can be accountable for them. Understand what the important drivers are, where we want to be and where we are now.

What do we need to do to get there? That's the key.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauzé, the floor is yours.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Good morning, everyone.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being with us today.

I'd have liked to be with you in person, but to avoid spreading little germs, it was a better idea for me to attend the meeting from my office.

I'll start with you, Mr. Ginsberg.

We believe that the government can amalgamate its policies in the act, which is fine. However, we have no illusions about the likelihood that the act will positively contribute to protecting nature and biodiversity.

For a long time, we've been calling on the government to stop making decisions that are incompatible with its own biodiversity objectives. We want it to stop paying lip service.

I'm going to talk to you about an announcement made earlier this week about the Vista coal mine. You can probably see where I'm going with this.

On December 6, the president of the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada announced that the project to expand phase II of the coal mine over approximately 630 hectares will continue without any assessment.

If no assessment is done, how can we know what impact it will have?

Your organization, Ecojustice, has said that, once expanded, the Vista mine would be the largest thermal coal mine in Canadian history.

Doesn't a free pass for coal like this thwart the potential gains of Bill C-73 when it comes to nature accountability?

A free pass will certainly not help us meet our objectives, will it?

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: Thank you for your question.

You're right. A project like the Vista mine has a profound impact on biodiversity, and it affects federal interests, particularly fisheries and other species at risk.

A large-scale thermal coal project like Vista certainly should have been assessed. However, I see that under the Nature Accountability Act, it wouldn't be possible to make a regulatory decision like that. That's not its purpose. However, it would provide a better understanding of how such decisions do or do not affect Canada's targets.

At the moment, we have no way to assess whether a regulatory decision will undermine our objectives. That's why we need a shield to protect biodiversity—that's one of our suggestions—and to ensure that federal authorities consider the impact of projects like Vista on Canada's biodiversity targets.

That should have been taken into account in the decision not to assess the project.

• (1710)

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

I let you elaborate because you had a lot to tell us about that decision. Here we are talking about biodiversity, and at the same time, decisions are being made to go in the opposite direction.

The bill provides for the preparation of national reports, including an assessment of Canada's progress in meeting global targets, any corrective measures taken or considered to address any failure to make progress on its contribution to meeting those targets, as well as any other information the minister considers appropriate.

Do you believe that the contents of the national reports required under the act as currently drafted are sufficient? Should more information be required? If so, what information would you like to see added to the reports?

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: We need to add domestic targets. There are none at the moment.

On the one hand, the targets ensure that the federal government takes into account all threats to nature and, on the other, they provide a solid foundation for attracting commitment by the provinces and indigenous peoples.

It's very important that these targets be specific and that they reflect Canada's international commitments to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Along the same lines, we recommend that the report required by the act explain the main threats to biodiversity. That's missing from the act and it needs to be added.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Currently, the act simply provides for the biodiversity targets in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Are there other areas the federal government could commit to and go further than the global targets do?

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: Many targets concern impacts on biodiversity and are explained in international biodiversity frameworks. I'm sorry, but I can only list them in English.

[English]

They include species abundance, species distribution, species extinction risk, habitat quality and extent and ecosystem integrity, connectivity and resilience. These are all things that are taken into account in our international commitments but not currently reflected in the law.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Pauzé. Your time is up. I gave you extra time.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'd like to thank Mr. Ginsberg for his efforts to answer in French.

The Chair: I was going to say the same thing. I gave him extra time in recognition of his commendable efforts to respond in French.

Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Collins is next.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much to the witnesses for being here and for all your work when it comes to promoting biodiversity and protecting nature.

I have a number of questions. Maybe I'll pick up where Madame Pauzé left off around targets.

Mr. Ginsberg, can you start by telling us a bit about the targets you're proposing and how they are connected to the global biodiversity framework?

• (1715)

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: Certainly. The GBF, as I explained perhaps rather haltingly in French, now does set out a number of interim targets to 2030, which are global in nature, but what that actuality means for Canada is unclear.

As I said in my opening remarks, that's left for each individual signatory to the treaty to define. We say that we should take those global lists and define—

Ms. Laurel Collins: If I could just quickly.... That's amazing. Can you talk about why it's so important to have guidance in this law for target setting?

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: We see it in the international examples as well. We won't get to the end state if we don't clearly state in the law what is required to get there. That's what accountability means: Parliament expressing the desire to get to a certain end state and then prescribing what the government must do in order to show that it is getting there.

In the U.K., the environmental targets for biodiversity—these are regulations made under the Environment Act 2021—set very detailed targets for species recovery, lowering extinction risk, species abundance and habitat restoration and creation.

We don't want to be a laggard in this area. That is the international best practice that we should follow.

Ms. Laurel Collins: That's great.

Why is it important for those targets to be set for milestone years?

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: That's already our practice in the net-zero act, which we've mentioned. There, the minister is required to set a national greenhouse gas emissions target for each milestone year, with a view to achieving that defined target. It's a very important accountability measure.

It would be incoherent to take a different approach with respect to biodiversity, and it might actually be even more important with respect to biodiversity, because of the complexity of nature reporting. We're dealing with many indicators, not just one. We have to make sure that we are on track and that, if we're not, we are correcting course in a timely way to achieve success. That's why we need time-bound indicators.

Ms. Laurel Collins: That's great.

Maybe turning to Ms. Johnston, then, is there anything you want to add about targets? Without tangible quantifiable targets, it's hard to see how this bill would enforce any accountability.

Do you want to expand at all on what Mr. Ginsberg said, especially about the repercussions the government could face if they fail to meet their targets?

Ms. Anna Johnston: Yes. Thanks for letting me expand on this.

First, I'd say that while climate change is an incredibly difficult challenge, as we all know, it's actually comparatively much simpler

to at least set targets for biodiversity. There are so many facets to biodiversity. It's such a complicated subject. That's why we're proposing in our amendments that the act be prescriptive about the areas that a government has to consider when it's setting targets, because there are, as we've both alluded to, so many drivers of biodiversity decline.

Also, then, when we're talking about biodiversity, we're talking about species, habitat and connectivity and ecosystems, and we need to have multiple targets so that we're attacking all of the root causes of nature loss and also making sure that we're protecting all the values. Targets are important because they tell us where we ought to be. How are we going to measure our progress if we don't have the signposts along the way?

When we talk about accountability, it's the same as under the Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act. We're not so much talking about legal accountability, because federalism and the provinces also have a huge role to play in protecting nature. We're not thinking that under this act—

Ms. Laurel Collins: Ms. Johnston, I'm just going to jump in because I'm running short of time and I do want to get a couple of questions in for some of the other witnesses.

Turning to Ms. Gue, can you expand on the importance of the GBF, the global biodiversity framework targets, but also maybe tie in a bit about the importance of government funding when it comes to meeting these goals?

Ms. Lisa Gue: Again, just to build on what we offered in our opening statement, this death by a thousand cuts problem, as my colleague stated, is really an apt characterization of one of the greatest failings in Canada's current approach to protecting nature, to protecting biodiversity. It's literally often a case of missing the forest for the trees.

While, yes, we have these imperfect processes for assessing and mitigating damage individually, on a case-by-case basis, what we see is that one step forward in one area is undermined by several steps back somewhere else. That's the turning point that the new global biodiversity framework targets offer us. It's an opportunity to see the whole, to see how to drive progress towards an overall result. However, to get there, we need, as my fellow panellists have pointed out, clear guideposts and transparency to know how we're doing, to track our progress.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We're really short for time. For the second round, I'm going to make it two minutes each.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Two minutes?

The Chair: Yes, unless you want to extend the meeting today.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Sure.

The Chair: It's two minutes each. That's time for a good question that packs a lot of punch.

We'll start with Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Heald, this will be for you.

The Liberals have introduced a national program for ecological corridors without consulting landowners or land users. The government claimed that this program was needed to connect protected areas.

However, there are many valid concerns that this is a backdoor attempt to restrict land use and access. I personally have concerns about the program, especially because it's run by Parks Canada.

Does your organization have any concerns about the national program for ecological corridors that this committee should be aware of?

Mr. Chris Heald: For sure. I mean, it's fitting into the same mould. We're not consulting with people that live and breathe on the ground. We're not talking to them. We are making decisions in Ottawa, Toronto or Vancouver.

Again, we're the oldest conservation organization in Manitoba. We were not consulted. We were not invited to the announcement, and neither were the landowners: It was only the groups that support the federal government's direction. We are being excluded.

We do have concerns, because we know where it's going to lead to. Without having a seat at the table and being part of discussions, of course we have concerns.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Do you have any reason to believe that the government's ecological corridor program is an attempt to restrict land use and land access?

Mr. Chris Heald: For sure. When you turn management over to Parks Canada, to indigenous protected areas or to different control mechanisms that are not by elected officials, how is there any accountability?

We are being excluded. The true conservationists—hunters, fishers, trappers and anglers on the ground—are being excluded from any of these discussions.

Mr. Dan Mazier: The most vocal supporters of Bill C-73 appear to be environmental activist groups that don't support land use or development. I think of organizations like Ecojustice, the David Suzuki Foundation and Greenpeace. Do you have anything to say about this?

Mr. Chris Heald: I mean, again, they don't support sustainable use of the resource. They don't support hunting and fishing by licensed hunters or anglers, so of course we have a concern. The government is only leaning on one side of the equation. They're not taking everybody's feelings and thoughts into account, so of course—

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Ms. Taylor Roy.

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

I know the time is short.

Ms. Gue, I'd like to direct my question to you. Perhaps this bill doesn't go far enough in some of the goal setting, but it has a lot of really important things in it, and I think you would agree. I'm just wondering about the trade-off between getting this bill through and putting in all of these different amendments.

In particular, when you're talking about setting the specific goals, my feeling is that it will take a lot of consultation. As you know, on the accountability part, the federal government has been having difficulty delivering on the targets, because obviously we have multi-jurisdictional government. We do not have jurisdiction over many things.

Could you talk a bit about the importance of getting this act through now? Also, I suppose, how can we address some of the things you've raised after it passes? Is that possible and is it important to get this done?

• (1725)

Ms. Lisa Gue: I might invite my co-panellist, Joshua Ginsberg, to add on the specific issue of the amendments he's suggesting for strengthening the target-setting portion of the bill.

I fully sympathize with the dilemma in front of you, Ms. Taylor Roy. However, I must respectfully reject the premise of the question. I do believe—I do dare to hope—that both are possible.

As I stated in my opening comments, we are asking MPs and Parliament to expedite the second reading debate and vote on this bill so that it can come to committee for strengthening amendments. I hope the committee will work together to find a path forward that enables a stronger version of this legislation to pass.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Pausé is next.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pausé: Ms. Johnston, in your remarks, you said that the government is good at making big speeches about nature, but not good enough at taking action. You also said that the act was not a true accountability act.

Let's talk about investment. Let's talk about money. Shouldn't more resources be earmarked for protecting nature? Next Monday, Minister Freeland will table her economic update. Do you hope to see something meaningful in this economic update, that is to say the resources needed to protect nature?

[*English*]

Ms. Anna Johnston: I'm sorry that I can't answer in French.

I can't speak to what the government will do next week, but I certainly hope that the fall economic statement will include a commitment to a renewal of nature funding, because you're right: It's absolutely critical that there is the money to implement the important protections that we hope to achieve for nature.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: How important do you think the nature advisory committee is? What would make it more effective?

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Anna Johnston: I think the advisory committee is absolutely critical. We need to get that independent expert advice before the federal government and also make sure that it's in front of the public. That's part of one of the cornerstones of accountability: being able to compare what the government is doing against what experts are saying needs to be done, and to make sure that it's efficient and effective.

When we look at the example of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada under the Species at Risk Act, what has made it really effective is its ability to set its own terms of reference—

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Collins, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to try to squeeze in two questions.

The first is a yes-or-no question for each panellist. You can say yes, no or pass.

Between 2020 and 2023, the percentage of Canadian areas designated as “protected” or covered by “other effective conservation measures” increased by just one per cent, from 12.5% to 13.6%. This raises serious concerns.

Do you think Canada is on track to meet its nature commitments?

I'll start with Ms. Gue.

Ms. Lisa Gue: No, and that's why we need this bill.

Ms. Laurel Collins: That's great.

In the room, Chair, can you indicate the next...?

The Chair: The next what...? I'm sorry....

Ms. Laurel Collins: I'm sorry.

Mr. Ginsberg, do you want to go next?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Ginsberg.

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: Thank you.

No, we're not on track. This bill will help.

The Chair: Ms. Johnston is next.

Ms. Anna Johnston: I echo what Mr. Ginsberg said.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Just in the interest of time, could the folks just say yes or no?

The Chair: Mr. Heald, did you get a chance...?

Mr. Chris Heald: No. I will.

No, because we're on the wrong direction.

Ms. Laurel Collins: I will try to squeeze the next question into one minute.

I'm really interested in the biodiversity shield. This is a proposal that a number of people have put forward.

Whoever wants to jump in, do you want to explain to the committee the importance of a biodiversity shield?

Ms. Anna Johnston: Maybe I can do that by giving an example.

About a year ago, the federal government approved the Cedar LNG facility in British Columbia despite the fact that it is going to impact the critical habitat of the marbled murrelet, a species at risk, which highlights exactly why we need to ensure that biodiversity considerations are baked into federal decision-making.

In my view, when we see in practice the federal government approving the further erosion of species at risk's critical habitat, it clearly shows the need for this kind of biodiversity shield.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Kram.

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start with Mr. Heald from the Manitoba Wildlife Federation.

The Kivalliq hydro-fibre link is a major project to connect Manitoba Hydro transmission lines to communities in Nunavut so that they can stop burning diesel. This project will also include fibre optic cables so that people in Nunavut can enjoy high-speed Internet access.

Can you speak to the effects of this legislation on projects such as that, given that it includes 1,200 kilometres of transmission lines in northern Manitoba?

Mr. Chris Heald: It's a huge concern for our organization and for first nations and taxpayers of Manitoba. That's a major link. If you can't have industrial development in any means—or mining or forestry—it can handicap future generations.

We feel there are better ways to make those areas protected, such as through wildlife management areas that can be permitted for certain issues like this, but it is a handicapping thing. If you put this in and put it under Parks Canada's control, you're turning over the decision-making to Parks Canada. That's a big concern for Manitobans.

Mr. Michael Kram: To date, how much consultation are you aware of with the agricultural producers in your province or in western Canada with respect to Bill C-73?

Mr. Chris Heald: There's none that I'm aware of.

Mr. Michael Kram: None that you're aware of.... Okay.

A voice: Wow.

Mr. Michael Kram: Why do you suppose these groups have been ignored?

Mr. Chris Heald: Of all of our national partners from each province, none of us has been consulted on this whatsoever.

On the indigenous protected area and the Seal River area alone, Parks Canada opened a public consultation during the summer holidays and has held just town halls in areas that support it. We have been excluded. When our members have asked to attend, we're not allowed to attend. That's where we're at right now.

Mr. Michael Kram: Are producers even aware that this legislation exists?

Mr. Chris Heald: No. We just learned about the ecological corridors maybe less than a month ago.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. van Koeverden, you have two minutes.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I'd like to ask for clarification. Did you just find out, a month ago, Mr. Heald, that there's an ecological corridors program?

Mr. Chris Heald: We just learned about it.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: We made an announcement in my riding, more than two years ago, about the ecological corridors project. It's fantastically popular with conservationists and with landowners. It has absolutely no implications for landowners, first of all. It's very popular, and it's been around for a long time, so I'm surprised that, as a conservationist, you haven't heard about it.

Mr. Chris Heald: No, we haven't been consulted or talked to about this at all. For the announcements that Terry Duguid made, nobody was invited. It was outside the circle.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Okay. Thanks.

To the best of your knowledge, Mr. Ginsberg, would this legislation have an impact on landowners' private land?

Mr. Joshua Ginsberg: It would not.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Ms. Johnston.

Ms. Anna Johnston: No. It has no substantive prohibitions or requirements. It would have no effect. It's a process law.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Right, and when land is protected for biodiversity protection, it can still be accessed for recreation, and certainly even for hunting.

Is that correct, Ms. Plotkin? I can see you nodding.

Ms. Rachel Plotkin: That is correct in most protected areas.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Yes. Canada is a large country with a lot of great open space and wonderful conservation areas. I think one of the least controversial issues is that we preserve it, save it and make sure that it's here for generations to come.

I'm a big fan of the outdoors, and I thank all four of you for coming and helping us strengthen this legislation.

I probably have less than one minute left. Ms. Johnston, if you could make one recommendation, in closing, for one way to strengthen this legislation, what would you do?

Ms. Anna Johnston: Probably, most critically, I'd beef up the requirements around the NBSAPs, the biodiversity strategies and action plans and reports, because that's really where we are able to see what the federal government is planning to do to protect nature.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: With my remaining 10 seconds, I'd just like to thank all of you.

The Chair: Now you're down to five.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I would like to thank all of you for contributing today. You do have a seat at the table because you are at the table. You are contributing to better legislation today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: There are five people here, and—

The Chair: This brings our panel to an end. We will stop briefly.

Thank you very much. It was a very interesting discussion. I think the two-minute system worked very well. People were really focused.

Thanks again. It was all very interesting.

• (1730) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1735)

The Chair: We will get started. Witnesses, please take your places.

I believe the online witness has had a sound check done, and everything is good.

We have with us for this second panel the Assembly of First Nations Yukon Region, the B.C. Wildlife Federation, Greenpeace Canada and Nature Canada.

We'll start with the Assembly of First Nations Yukon Region. I believe it's Regional Chief Kluane Adamek who will be speaking.

The floor is yours, Chief, for five minutes. Go ahead.

Regional Chief Kluane Adamek (Regional Chief, Assembly of First Nations Yukon Region): I'm hoping the timing starts now, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, it starts right now.

Regional Chief Kluane Adamek: [*Witness spoke in Southern Tutchone and provided the following translation:*]

Greetings. My name is Kluane Adamek. I am from Kluane First Nation and the Kluane people. I come from the Dakł'aweidí clan. My traditional name is Aagé. I hold my hands up and give thanks to the Algonquin people, whose territory we are on.

[*English*]

Thank you so much for the opportunity to share with this important committee as you work through the precursors to Bill C-73. In terms of my remarks today, I'm going to be very specific about recommendations for amendments as we view them through a first nations lens.

This bill is critically important to ensure there are accountability mechanisms in place with respect to implementation. Bill C-73 is an important component of Canada's plan to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. However, as introduced, it requires a few changes to do so. Firstly, we require more commitments within the bill, including legislation that targets achievement rather than just reporting on progress. I'll give a few examples for that shortly. Secondly, it requires a study of Canadian legislation, policies, programs and subsidies that are harmful to biodiversity, and the creation of a plan to address them. Lastly, it should legislate authority, responsibility and capacity to the ministerial advisory committee, as well as ensure there is specific representation from first nations individuals.

Now, Métis and Inuit, I'm assuming, will have a chance to speak with you regarding their amendments, so I say this specifically from a first nations perspective: We require a member on this committee. I can speak to the importance of this, as I served on Canada's Net-Zero Advisory Body. Ensure that indigenous voices are represented at all levels where decisions or advice related to the land, environment, water and, of course, biodiversity are concerned. This is absolutely critical from a rights-based approach.

The stronger commitments in this bill require ministers to be responsible for each target and to create accountability for lack of progress on missed targets, which is currently not included. In order to identify key drivers of biodiversity loss, a critical component of the success of this bill and the NBSAP is the requirement of a process to identify legislation, policies and programming—including subsidies—that drive biodiversity loss. Without a process like this or actions on findings, Canada is setting conservation targets while simultaneously working against these targets, therefore supporting further degradation of biodiversity. This study should identify legislation, programs, policies and subsidies that harm biodiversity, identify the ministers responsible, recommend measures to reduce and eliminate these mechanisms, and report on progress via national reports.

As mentioned, as guidance for a mechanism for Canada's successful halting and reversing of biodiversity loss, the advisory committee must be appropriately funded and equipped. It requires the importance of incorporating traditional knowledge and western science to advise on conservation. The indigenous knowledge must come directly from indigenous knowledge-holders. As such, this advisory body must ensure there is a rights-based lens. To enable this, the bill must authorize the committee to review and advise on

elements related to Canada achieving biodiversity outcomes, and it must commit appropriate and sustainable resources to this work.

I'll share a reflection with the committee. It goes like this: I come from Kluane First Nation. You can google "Kluane National Park". Our lake has gone down by 10 feet in the last 10 years. The ways in which our fish are growing have changed. The mass number of wolves we see in our territory has impacted the way we hunt moose and caribou. If we don't put into the plan an action on accountability with respect to this bill, we're going to be looking to these species and observing biodiversity, but there will be no accountability for the ways in which some of the work is being implemented and how it will be reviewed in terms of data.

This is where we require some of the amendments I have suggested. Specifically, from a rights-based approach, you have to include first nations. This bill, in our view—though, geopolitically, there is a very partisan environment here in Canada—is something that every single party should be getting behind, because we have to be accountable.

• (1740)

There's no way of moving forward without ensuring that we're actually tracking what it is that we're seeking to achieve. That is a first nation view to this legislation.

Again, amendments are required, but we really should all be getting behind this, because we're all a son, a daughter, a granddaughter, or perhaps have children of our own. If we do not do this right, right now, there are impacts that we may experience moving forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Well put.

Regional Chief Kluane Adamek: I've got there on time. I'm good.

The Chair: Well put.

We'll go now to Mr. Jesse Zeman, from the B.C. Wildlife Federation, who is online.

Mr. Jesse Zeman (Executive Director, B.C. Wildlife Federation): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to the committee for the opportunity to be a witness.

The B.C. Wildlife Federation is British Columbia's largest and oldest conservation organization, with over 40,000 members and 100 clubs across the province. Our clubs and members spend hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours and dollars conducting wildlife, wetland and fish habitat restoration, as well as advocating for legislative, regulatory and policy changes to support a future that includes healthy fish, wildlife and habitat.

Over the past two years in the world of fish, wildlife, habitat, water and wetlands, the BCWF has delivered over 100 projects worth more than \$7 million while partnering with over 50 indigenous communities. This includes 71 beaver dam analogues built in 2024 and nearly 45,000 kilograms of garbage removed from the tidal marsh in the Fraser River. Since 2021, we've delivered over 230 projects and more than \$11 million in project work for the benefit of the environment.

Our partners and funders include indigenous communities, ENGOs, local communities, private landholders, the Government of Canada and the Province of B.C. Our 2016 estimate of volunteer contribution by our members was over 300,000 hours per year. I believe we greatly exceed that now.

Our membership is dedicated to the conservation of fish, wildlife and habitat, donating hours and dollars to science and on-the-ground stewardship; however, our membership is also extremely concerned about the future of public access to fish, wildlife habitat and nature in general.

The BCWF is deeply concerned that Bill C-73 does not ensure a future in which Canadians can camp, hike, backpack, birdwatch and hunt and fish sustainably. These sustainable lifestyles and sustainable recreation must be front and centre for new land designations.

This bill provides the Minister of Environment and Climate Change powers that do not include adequate parliamentary oversight. The bill talks about collaboration, but does not ensure stakeholders, where British Columbians will be consulted, and the bill provides authority to set aside public land and delegate control to unelected management authorities. Consultation includes provinces, indigenous peoples of Canada and an advisory committee. There is no stipulation as to the representation of the advisory committee.

We have a number of examples where the Minister of Environment and Climate Change has failed to consult and sometimes represent the public, including caribou recovery in northeast B.C., which has set a number of our communities back by decades, and a lack of leadership around ensuring public access for sustainable lifestyles and sustainable outdoor recreation around mechanisms to achieve the 30 by 30 targets. We believe that connecting British Columbians and Canadians to nature is good for their mental and physical health, and that people connected to the land are people who will protect it.

The BCWF supports increased conservation. However, there is significant concern that this comes at the expense of eliminating sustainable use and sustainable outdoor recreation. The BCWF has experienced this with the proposed South Okanagan-Similkameen national park reserve in the same area where our members have

funded, donated to and volunteered for the largest and most collaborative mule deer research project in the province's history. Throughout this project, our members have assisted in capturing, GPS collaring and doing mortality investigations on mule deer, as well as deploying and maintaining over 150 remote sensing trail cameras and reviewing millions of pictures.

These same people are now being told by the Government of Canada that it does not want to see them hunting in their own backyard because it's being turned into a national park reserve. We have also experienced declarations of moratoriums on licensed hunting through other federally derived conservation mechanisms.

This bill does not give us comfort that British Columbians and Canadians will be able to enjoy and interact with nature in the same places and in the same ways we can today. If Canadian families are out camping, hiking, backpacking and hunting and fishing sustainably, the Government of Canada should be saying: "This is great. We want more people and their kids off their screens and out connecting with nature." The Government of Canada should be encouraging and supporting sustainable lifestyles and sustainable outdoor recreation, and that should be recognized in this bill.

To close, everyone needs to see themselves in our shared future.

Thanks for your time.

• (1745)

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

I will go to Greenpeace Canada as represented by Mr. Stephen Hazell.

Mr. Stephen Hazell (Consultant, Greenpeace Canada): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members.

My name is Stephen Hazell. I'm pleased to represent Greenpeace Canada today on the traditional, unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin people. Thanks for the opportunity to appear.

Greenpeace is an independent, not-for-profit organization that uses peaceful protest to work towards a greener, more peaceful world. My role is as a consultant on federal nature law and policy. Formerly, I was executive director to a number of national environmental and nature groups. I served as regulatory affairs director of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency and as adjunct professor of environmental law at uOttawa.

Greenpeace's overarching message is this. With amendments, Bill C-73 could be an important tool to hold Canada accountable to meet its international commitments to halt and reverse nature loss. Nature in Canada is in dire crisis. As of 2020, 873 species have been identified as critically imperiled. Highly endangered northern spotted owls have dwindled in number to just one female in the wild. Boreal caribou populations are in sharp decline across Canada's north. The population of endangered right whales has continued to decline in the past decade, despite efforts to reduce entanglements and vessel strikes.

Overall, Canada has repeatedly fallen short in fulfilling our commitments to protect nature since the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. Federal and provincial nature laws have been largely ineffective and poorly implemented. Canadians are now demanding a strong nature law. A Greenpeace petition now has almost 90,000 signatures. The landmark 2022 global biodiversity framework, signed by 196 countries, is a tremendous opportunity for Canada to halt human-induced extinction of threatened species and to protect 30% of terrestrial and marine areas. This can and must be achieved while respecting the principle of free, prior and informed consent under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

My colleagues has talked about the CNZEAA, the Canada Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act. Implementation has shown that legally binding targets and plans do drive progress—in this case, on climate. The same is true for nature. Accountability is required to ensure progress, and legislation is needed to ensure accountability.

Bill C-73 does need strengthening. Greenpeace Canada strongly supports the amendments proposed by Ecojustice and West Coast Environmental Law in the previous panel. I'll highlight a few of these amendments as follows.

The biodiversity shield amendment would support a whole-of-government approach, which is critical to ensure consistency in Canada's nature protection efforts so that you don't have one department saying one thing and another department doing something that is completely contrary. That's what we mean by whole-of-government approaches.

Amendments are also needed to ensure that the proposed advisory committee has a legislated mandate to ensure its independence and effectiveness. I, myself, would say that anglers, hunters, landowners and ranchers are all experts as well. They're the people who manage wildlife on their land. I don't see any reason that you wouldn't have them on the advisory committee as well. In fact, the species at risk advisory committee did have anglers and hunters on it. I don't know why we wouldn't do that again under this bill.

In a country that's built on colonial resource extraction, Bill C-73 must also explicitly prioritize the rights and leadership of indigenous peoples. Bill C-73 should also acknowledge that the rights of nature are inherent to the right to a healthy environment as currently proposed by the government in the draft implementation framework for the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

Note that Bill C-73's accountability framework mandates federal action, such as setting Canada-wide targets, but not action by provincial or territorial governments. Provinces and territories hold

much, if not most, of the authority under Canada's constitution to conserve and restore nature, so collaboration among the several levels of government is absolutely critical to meeting the overall national targets.

In conclusion, a strong Bill C-73 would signal true leadership in Canada and leadership internationally to halt and reverse nature loss.

Thank you so much. I look forward to questions.

• (1750)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hazell.

From Nature Canada, we have Mr. Akaash Maharaj.

Go ahead. You have five minutes.

Mr. Akaash Maharaj (Director of Policy, Nature Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the members of the committee for inviting me to contribute to your deliberations on Bill C-73.

I am Akaash Maharaj, head of policy for Nature Canada, one of our country's oldest conservation institutions. Nature Canada rallies together more than 250,000 individual Canadians and a network of more than 1,200 organizations in every province and territory.

To be direct, our world is currently enduring the sixth mass extinction in planetary history, the Anthropocene extinction. Unlike the five great dyings of past epochs, this one is driven not by natural catastrophes, but instead by human activity and, in particular, by habitat destruction. Species are currently disappearing at 1,000 times the natural extinction rate, and nearly 30% of surviving species are threatened with extinctions. Bluntly, we are in the midst of the gravest extermination crisis of life on our planet since the end of the dinosaurs.

For this reason, Nature Canada's members are convinced that Canada has made the right decision in joining the Convention on Biological Diversity, and especially in committing to conserve our lands and waters. Canadians are not committed to international standards to please international institutions. We are committed to them for the good of Canadians, for the well-being and prosperity of Canadian communities, and to leave a better country for future generations of Canadians.

However, a commitment is only as good as the acts that follow it. When Canadians describe a promise as being a political promise, we are rarely expressing our confidence that those promises will be kept. This is why Nature Canada is enthusiastic about a nature accountability act, a federal law that would bind the federal Environment Minister and compel him to keep his conservation and biodiversity promises to Canadians.

Bill C-73, as it currently stands, is not that law. The only accountability in the current text is in its title. The bill directs the minister to set national targets, but it has no mechanism to ensure that his targets are meaningful. The bill encourages the minister to develop measures linked to those targets, but it has no requirements that he actually meet any of his targets, and it levies no consequences if he fails to do so. In essence, the bill neither provides the minister with any powers not already held, nor does it bind the minister to any outcomes.

However, it could do all that and more if the legislators in this room were willing to summon their determination to amend it. We ask you to consider and to make the following amendments.

In clause 4, make it explicit that the minister is accountable to Parliament and to Canadians not only for developing a plan towards the target, but also for actually implementing that plan and meeting those targets.

In clause 5, ensure that the minister's targets are tied to species abundance, distribution, extinction risk and habitat quality, and are informed by an assessment process conducted by the committee on the status of endangered wildlife in Canada.

In clause 6, bind the minister's reports to the new anti-greenwashing provisions of the Competition Act's provisions that prohibit entities from making false or misleading claims about the environmental benefits of their offerings.

In clause 7, strengthen the mandate and the independence of the new advisory committee so that if the minister chooses not to implement a committee recommendation, he will have a positive responsibility to report his reasons to Parliament.

In clause 9, include a statutory requirement that the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development conduct and publish independent audits on ministerial compliance with the act.

These amendments would make the nature accountability act a law worthy of its name, and as importantly, it would reassert the role of parliamentarians as the guardians of our democracy.

Across the world, democracies are in decline. They are not dying on the barricades in a noble struggle against tyrants. They are surrendering themselves willingly to demagogues and to authoritarians because their peoples have come to believe that public institutions are operating without effect and without accountability. I ask you to amend this bill to stand up for Canada's natural heritage and to stand up for our democracy.

• (1755)

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

We'll go to the six-minute round.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to start my questions with Mr. Zeman from the British Columbia Wildlife Federation.

I want to thank him for his testimony and thank him and his members for the tremendous grassroots efforts that have been made to do on-the-ground work for the benefit of all British Columbians and all Canadians, through protecting and doing habitat enhancement.

Mr. Zeman, the previous witness on this—and I'm assuming you saw Ms. Anna Johnston from the West Coast Environmental Law Association—said that this law is a process law, and by that, it does not actually impact anything on the ground.

What was the B.C. Wildlife Federation's role in helping the government craft this legislation? Were you consulted prior to the development of this legislation? As well, because it's a process law, how would this help the B.C. Wildlife Federation to deliver meaningful conservation programs on the ground, if at all?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: The first question was whether we were consulted on this law. No, to my knowledge, our organization was not.

The second question was, how does this help? The challenge we're having out here, quite frankly, is this: There is a lot of concern about federal mandates and federal funding for protected areas. Our organization, by and large, supports increased conservation measures. I think we demonstrated that when we talked about all the things we do. Our challenge, and the concern in B.C., is that British Columbians who go out camping, hiking, hunting and fishing will be excluded from these places. You talk about outcomes for conservation. If you throw the conservationist out, you are, in part, throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

I think the broader challenge here is that you need people who buy into the outcomes of conservation designations, and who are there to support them and defend them, as opposed to removing them.

• (1800)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Do you see this legislation attempting to be conservation or preservation?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: It looks like preservation.

Certainly, given our experience over, probably, the last decade as it relates to the national park reserve and other discussions around the nature agreement, we don't see ourselves in this future, for sure.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay.

I want to talk about access.

What is the concern insofar as access in a preservation model? I used to be a national park warden. I used to be a conservation officer with the Province of Alberta. I was a fisheries technician. I worked for the Government of Alberta and numerous conservation organizations “when I wore a younger man's clothes”, as Billy Joel says.

From your perspective as a federation, could you please tell me what the concerns of your members are when it comes to being able to practise conservation-type activities, such as hunting and fishing, and differentiating that from other activities insofar as access?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Generally speaking, preservation is a hands-off approach, whereas conservation sees people as part of land management, wildlife management and fish management.

In the world of conservation, we talk about our projects. For example, we were just down in south Okanagan the other day. We were putting out a bunch more trail cameras where we're looking to do a prescribed and cultural burn, which is active land management in the Okanagan. This is a fire-maintained ecosystem—and a pile of it. A hundred years ago, we started suppressing fire. In the 1950s, we invented Smokey the Bear, a fraud who said, “Put out forest fires”. What we're learning here is that forest fires and controlled, prescribed and cultural burns are part of landscape management. Our ecosystems need fire to function.

That would be the difference between conservation and preservation, I guess, in this case.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I agree with you. I think the people of Jasper fully understand, now, what the difference is between a preservation and a conservation model, and what happens when you sterilize, from human use and human activity, vast tracts of land without active conservation and management. For example, Jasper National Park did not do any wolf predation control and has since lost the caribou herds that spent most or some of their life cycle inside Jasper National Park. Yet, everybody outside Jasper National Park was blamed for that population declining.

I think the overall goal here, for the government—through the United Nations framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity—is 30% by 2030, but it's also 50% by 2050. When I went to university, the model was 12.5% preservation and 75% active management—12.5% is used by cities and so on. I don't imagine that anybody in any urban environment is going to be asked to tear down their house to make way for nature. Who, then, is going to be asked to cede their land or territory? The question has been asked here about whether this would affect private land. Because it's a process bill—and one could argue that the Species at Risk Act is a process act—it can very much impact a landowner.

Can you tell us how the government could possibly get to 50% of the biozones in Canada without having an impact on privately owned land?

The Chair: Can you answer in 15 seconds, please?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: In 15 seconds, the answer is no, I can't.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll go to Madame Chatel.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

In the Outaouais region, just the other side of the Ottawa River, over two years ago, we organized a regional COP15. I assembled over 70 community leaders, including the indigenous guardians of Kitigan Zibi, because we wanted to ensure that the conservation efforts were locally grounded, effective and credible.

From this gathering, we created something quite unique. The project is called *Kidjīmāninān*, which means “our canoe”. That means we're all in it together. It's an indigenous-led conservancy project involving over 40 municipalities and 10 organizations and industries all together. We received \$2 million from Environment Canada and we launched this project this summer. This will make the Outaouais the first region in Canada to try to develop a road map to meet our biodiversity targets.

My question is for Chief Adamek. How could Bill C-73 mandate greater recognition, funding and support for similar indigenous-led initiatives across Canada?

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Regional Chief Kluane Adamek: Thank you for your question.

I believe that a committee is a way to ensure that the minister responsible for implementing the act is held accountable.

[*English*]

It would certainly be that within the legislation and the specifics around, as mentioned, some of the accountability in terms of data collection, monitoring and assessment. You mentioned the one canoe project, which I think is a great example, but in the long term, how is that one canoe project being tracked and what are the outcomes specifically? As one of your colleagues on this committee shared, the 50% by 2050 target is ambitious but, in my view, it's not impossible.

In fact, we see indigenous and protected conserved areas, just like in Yukon with the Kaska Dena Council. To those who are having side chatter and some laughs on the side, I would really encourage you to take a look at the Kaska Dena and what they've done with their indigenous and protected and conserved areas.

Again, I think the goals are ambitious, but we don't have another planet. There's no Plan B. The option here is to really lean in and work together to be able to advance and support first nations-led, of course, conservation and biodiversity protection.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you so much.

From my experience, indigenous-led biodiversity projects are very successful and have shown great leadership. I hope every region in Canada will follow examples like this.

I would like to ask a question of Mr. Hazell. When he came, the minister spoke about his openness to suggestions for how to improve Bill C-73. I would like you to mention, if you have time, five key amendments you would like to see.

Mr. Stephen Hazell: Five?

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I know there are more.

Mr. Stephen Hazell: To get the five important ones.... I think my colleagues on the previous panel mentioned a few. Embedding target setting legally in the bill is important, because that's not there. That's one.

Ensure that the NBSAPs have some meat on them in the legislation. Describe what the minister must do in terms of producing the NBSAP. That, certainly, is a second one.

A third one is that the advisory committee needs some amendments to ensure that it is independent and can set its own mandate. I come back to the point I made earlier. I think we have to try to bridge this gap between stuff that happens in Ottawa and the solid conservation work that happens on the ground and in the water, whether it's done by the wildlife federation representatives who have been mentioned or by indigenous peoples. We have to figure out how to bridge that gap.

This bill is a much smaller bill than what's been represented. It's really about accountability and measuring progress. I just don't see how we can be against that.

Another amendment would relate to the commissioner of the environment. I think it's important that the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development has the explicit authority under the legislation to conduct audits, as he currently does now under the CNZEAA legislation.

Those are—

• (1810)

The Chair: Thank you.

If you haven't already included those recommendations in your brief, perhaps you could send them to us.

Mr. Stephen Hazell: Yes, they're all in the brief.

The Chair: Perfect.

Madame Pausé.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Hazell, in your remarks, you talked about the fact that Canada has not met and is not meeting its commitments.

I'm going to read you some newspaper headlines from recent weeks or months: "Ottawa setting the stage for an offshore oil boom"; "60 oil drilling projects found to have no major repercussions"; "Exxon-Mobil looking for a deposit three times bigger than Bay du Nord off Newfoundland". Here's one last one, from a European newspaper: "Canada, a steward of global biodiversity, authorizes oil and gas in marine protected areas".

The minister recently appeared before the committee, and I asked him a question. He told me that oil drilling is prohibited in or near marine refuges. However, we see that the government is authorizing exploratory drilling to look for deposits. If the company finds deposits, the government removes the protection status of those targeted areas.

If Bill C-73 as currently drafted were in force right now, would it prevent the federal government from promoting oil development on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and removing protections when oil deposits are found?

Mr. Stephen Hazell: My answer is no.

[*English*]

This bill really has nothing to do with oil and gas exploration, whether offshore or onshore. It just doesn't. We have to come at these issues of oil and gas exploration and their impact on nature using other laws, whether those are federal laws or provincial laws. This bill really doesn't speak to that issue that you're identifying, if I've understood you correctly.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pausé: Therefore, Bill C-73 can't do anything right now to protect biodiversity, from oil drilling or from a coal mine. Normally, the provinces protect the land and the federal government protects the oceans. Right now, we're talking about shared responsibility between the federal government and the provinces.

What does Bill C-73 mean for the governments of Quebec and the provinces? Under the Constitution, they retain most of their legislative authority over nature conservation in terrestrial ecosystems.

Mr. Stephen Hazell: You're right.

[*English*]

I think that this bill has been fairly carefully written so far and our amendments are trying to do the same thing, which is to ensure that the obligations under the act fall on the federal minister and do not fall on provinces. They don't really oblige provinces to do anything.

Given that the provinces have the substantial authority to legislate with respect to nature, it's imperative that the provinces, territories and indigenous governments get involved. It's essential that they assist in delivering on the targets that have been set nationally.

This is a much smaller bill than some are suggesting. This bill is really pretty limited to trying to figure out whether or not we're making progress on biodiversity.

Unfortunately, there's a long history in this country of governments dissembling and pretending that we're making progress by writing the reports in such a way as to appear that there is progress, when the science says that nature is in decline across the board.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I quite agree with your analysis of all this.

Ultimately, it seems that the bill enshrines in law the agreements that have taken place internationally.

In 2020, the Convention on Biological Diversity secretariat stated that Canada had not met its commitments under the convention.

As currently drafted, could the proposed Nature Accountability Act guarantee that domestic biodiversity strategies and action plans will be sufficient to meet the 2030 targets and the long-term 2050 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework?

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Hazell: There is no guarantee.

There are no guarantees there. In a way, if Bill C-73 is passed, it will be up to the nature community. It'll be the folks sitting at this table, the wildlife federations across the country. It'll be up to the the Canadian public to look at the reports that are generated and say, how are we doing in terms of protecting southern resident orcas.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Collins is next.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today.

I have a number of questions for a few of the witnesses, but maybe I'll start with Mr. Hazell.

You mentioned a biodiversity shield in your opening remarks. Can you talk a bit more about what that biodiversity shield would look like and what the amendment you're suggesting would mean in practice for federal decision-making?

Mr. Stephen Hazell: The three organizations—Ecojustice, West Coast Environmental Law and Greenpeace—had two ideas for this biodiversity shield, but the basic idea is that there be some communication among federal departments and agencies to ensure that nature and biodiversity are taken into account in all government decisions.

Unfortunately, the federal government is a big place, and lots of people are doing lots of different stuff, and a lot of that stuff is at cross-purposes to each other. This law would try to herd those cats to try to ensure that, whether or not it's Natural Resources Canada making a decision with some coal mine or some offshore oil and gas project, nature is being considered in those decisions.

We had two suggestions.

One, the most benign, would be that the departments must take into consideration nature and biodiversity in bringing forward proposals to cabinet. That's the less dramatic of the two.

The second one would be to put a positive obligation on them to ensure that whatever decisions they make do not harm, do not breach, Canada's obligations under the act or internationally. That's

a bit of a tougher swallow for the government, I guess, but we still think that they both would help.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thanks so much.

I asked the previous panel about this, but really, in thinking about Canada's slow progress when it comes to conservation, I have deep concerns about whether or not we're going to meet our targets of 25% by 2025 and 30% by 2030.

Maybe I'll start with the three people in the room.

Yes or no, do you feel that Canada is on track to meet its nature commitments? Also, then, I'd love to hear from each of you whether you think this bill, if not amended, has a realistic shot of getting us on track?

I'll start with Mr. Hazell.

Mr. Stephen Hazell: No, we're not on track. I think the bill will help, especially if we have amendments.

• (1820)

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thanks.

Mr. Maharaj is next.

Mr. Akaash Maharaj: No, we will not meet our targets. In addition to 30% by 2030, there is a commitment to 25% by 2025, and 2025 arrives in 20 days. We are at roughly 14%. We're not making up the other 11% in that time.

Should the bill pass, even if it's not amended, there is no harm in doing so, but it would be a terrible missed opportunity. It would be an exercise in political communications rather than an exercise in public policy.

I think there is perhaps one downside, and that is that every time governments of any stripe make promises that they do not keep, it erodes public confidence in public institutions.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you so much.

Go ahead, Ms. Adamek.

Regional Chief Kluane Adamek: Maybe I'm the optimist here, but I do believe we can achieve those goals—if you work in partnership with indigenous peoples. A large amount of that 14% is with indigenous protected and conserved areas. Therefore, we must find ways to propel and support those communities as rights holders to the land. There were questions earlier about when people have to leave their houses and that trees are going to be planted. Take a moment here. What we're talking about is potentially fee simple land, and also Crown land. Most importantly, all land, as we learned in the most recent Supreme Court case, is first nation land or Inuit land or Métis land right across this country.

Again, as the optimist at the table, if we are going to reach these targets, it will only happen if you work in partnership with indigenous peoples. That has been made very clear, in my view, by the ways that the IPCAs have supported that 14%, which we would love to see get bigger.

With respect to the second part of your question, have we reached them? No. Is there still time? In my view and in AFN's view, there is still time, although perhaps more the 30% by 2030 as opposed to the 25% by 2025.

Look, if this bill doesn't pass, then all of the work that's being done to achieve these goals, which are not just Canada's goals, but also—

Ms. Laurel Collins: I'm so sorry to interrupt you. I have a follow-up question, and I think I have only 30 seconds left.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds. I'm sorry.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Okay.

I will let you know my question and follow up in the next round. I really want to get your perspective on how you see this bill working with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I'll ask that in my next round.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

We will now begin the second round of questions.

The distribution of speaking time in the first round seems to have worked well, when everyone had two minutes. We're going to do the same thing, although we will still run a little late.

Mr. Kram, you have the floor for two minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Kram: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is for Mr. Zeman from the B.C. Wildlife Federation.

Given the time constraints, you didn't quite have time to answer the last question by my colleague Mr. Calkins about landowners. If you could be so kind as to submit a written submission on that, that would be very helpful.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Was that the question about 50% by 2050?

Mr. Michael Kram: That's right.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Okay. We'll have to do some work on that.

Mr. Michael Kram: Thank you.

Still with you, Mr. Zeman, the Premier of Yukon Territory and the territory's Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources have publicly expressed their support for a project to connect the territory's power grid to B.C.'s Site C hydro dam so that the territory can stop burning diesel. They've called this a "generational investment" and a "nation-building moment".

Mr. Zeman, can you speak to the effects of Bill C-73 on the future of major projects such as this?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I'm sorry. I'm not aware of the connection to Site C or the plan from Yukon down to B.C. In the world of major projects, our focus is really around the world of conservation.

Generally speaking, our message here is that Ottawa is not connected to people who live in the communities who are impacted, or not impacted by conservation outcomes. I think that's the message we're trying to get across. I think everyone here should be cognizant of that. We talked about the national park reserve where that's been introduced. There's been tremendous social conflict in all of the communities. Prior to that, 44,000 hectares had been acquired and restored by groups like Ducks Unlimited, Nature Trust, Nature Conservancy and hunters and anglers, and no one had an issue.

I think what we're trying to get across here is that there's a big place called Ottawa, and it is out of touch with communities and people who have their hands in the ground and are working together. That is one of the missing pieces in this bill.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Longfield for two minutes.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Maharaj, thank you for succinctly addressing each clause that you had some comments on. I want to circle back to a couple of them, if I might.

With regard to clause 9 and audits, Mr. Hazell also mentioned the commissioner of sustainable development and climate change being involved in the audit process. Is that something you were thinking about there and having that come back to Parliament or through this committee?

Mr. Akaash Maharaj: Absolutely. No person can be a dispassionate judge of his or her own desserts. Any minister of any stripe will always tell a good story about their achievements. The auditor has no such restrictions. It must come back to Parliament.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you. He makes us uncomfortable, but that's his job. He's always at our committee. I think he's been here six times in the last couple of months.

Regarding clause 6 on the assessment process, I'm thinking of the University of Guelph. I think about them a lot, which is no surprise, being the member of Parliament for Guelph. They have the Biodiversity Institute that's been tracking biodiversity loss among animal and plant life forms across the planet.

Is that about getting data from universities, including, let's say, the University of Guelph? Are third party assessments what you're thinking about, in terms of assessment?

Mr. Akaash Maharaj: Yes. It's universities, expert groups and the Government of Canada's own committees and facilities. It is an extraordinary matter that there is so much expertise within the government itself, which is not represented in the bill.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

In the few seconds I have left, Chief Adamek, thank you, thank you. Your optimism is something we need more of, but we also need that accountability. I think you hit a perfect balance there, so thank you for being at our committee.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Longfield.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

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

My question is for you, Mr. Hazell, and it has to do with funding.

In your opinion, what investments would be needed for Canada to meet its commitments to nature?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Hazell: We need funding to deliver on this bill, and to deliver on the NBSAPs—the action plans—so we can provide support to indigenous nations and indigenous protected areas. It's also to support the work of local folks—the anglers, hunters, etc. who are doing good work on the ground. There needs to be that program.

There is a major concern about funding winding up in this fiscal year, so this next budget must have significant new funding for nature in order to meet the targets Canada agreed to. Remember, Canada championed the global biodiversity framework. Canada was hailed around the world for the work we did in getting this deal done. Greenpeace International thanked the Prime Minister and the Minister of Environment for the work they did.

Now we have to deliver.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Yes, I was going to lead you to discussing that, Mr. Hazell.

The government may have worked well on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. However, we heard this week that there will be no impact assessment on a major coal mine expansion project.

How are we going to meet our targets, whether it's our greenhouse gas reduction targets or our biodiversity targets?

The Chair: I'll give you 10 seconds if you want to respond, Mr. Hazell.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Hazell: The answer lies with another federal law, the Impact Assessment Act, and in making sure big projects are subject to federal assessments.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Collins, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins: I will follow up with Chief Adamek.

As you mentioned, indigenous protected areas make up a huge part of the progress that has been made when it comes to protecting nature in Canada. Indigenous guardians are such an inspiring example of how conservation can be done in line with upholding indigenous rights. You rightly raised the importance of having first nations, Inuit and Métis governments at the table.

I'm curious about whether there are other ways you see this bill interacting with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and making sure that the voices and perspectives of different nations across Canada are heard and respected.

• (1830)

Regional Chief Kluane Adamek: Thank you.

We want to acknowledge that there are positive steps by which the legislation is referenced, but there are elements of UNDRIP that need to be further included in the bill. In my opening remarks, I specifically referred to the ministerial advisory committee. There are other elements of this legislation that require direct correlation with UNDRIP. As we know, the right approach is a rights-based approach.

Lastly, I think it's important to remind ourselves that any major project, as was mentioned, must go through the Impact Assessment Act.

This bill, Member Kram, is not related. This bill is specifically looking to ensure that we are keeping on track with our targets with respect to conservation. Being from Yukon, it is important that I share that the impacts of the project with respect to this legislation is zero. It would be then, rather, directed to the IAA.

The Chair: The time is more or less up, Ms. Collins.

[Translation]

Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

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

Gentlemen, and Chief Adamek, welcome to your Parliament.

Mr. Maharaj, hello again. I had the pleasure of meeting you yesterday.

In your testimony, you talked about the fact that public trust could be eroded if a lot of announcements are made but no results are achieved. However, we recently learned that nearly three-quarters of the projects in the net zero accelerator initiative, had no target. This is \$8 billion of taxpayers' money being given to companies to achieve net zero, but they have no target.

Do you think managing public funds in this way with the laudable goal of reducing emissions undermines the credibility of efforts to achieve net zero?

[English]

Mr. Akaash Maharaj: That is obviously beyond the scope of Bill C-73, but I understand that you're asking it as an analogy about governments keeping their promises and being sound stewards of public funds in environmental projects—so, clearly not.

When governments miss their targets or handle public funds in a way that falls short of what they said, it damages public expectations, and it damages public support for those very programs. I would say that the remedies to that are more robust parliamentary investigations and actions and raising these matters to public attention.

Ultimately, a sound conservation strategy will win public confidence. Canadians believe in and support conservation. To the extent that you can reward the government when it does well and punish it when it does poorly, you will be doing a service for our country.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: What do you think is most effective? Having a specific project that directly and concretely targets pollution reduction? Is it instead having ambitious emissions reduction targets based on a set percentage spread out over many years, founded on 30-year-old data and using a questionable calculation method? What do you think is better? Concrete action, or—

The Chair: Please provide a very quick response, Mr. Maharaj.

[English]

Mr. Akaash Maharaj: In my own view, it's better to have modest promises that you keep rather than ambitious promises that you do not.

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

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

Thanks to our expert witnesses for joining us today and for sharing with us their insights.

I wish we had more time. I wish we had more meetings, and I wish we started a couple of months ago, but sadly, opposition parties filibustered my motion to bring this prestudy forward to this committee. However, I'm glad we're here.

Unfortunately, we've seen some conservative witnesses do a little bit of fearmongering with respect to their concerns around private land and hunting rights. I feel as though those concerns have been more or less debunked by experts who know how this legislation works.

I'm from Ontario, and we're fortunate in Ontario to have legislation on conservation authorities. Unfortunately, the provincial gov-

ernment has recently been undermining some of the abilities of our conservation authorities to do their important work.

If this bill passes, clearly it wouldn't prevent provinces from exercising their rights and doing what they would like, but I would like to know, from your perspective, what steps you believe are necessary to be taken, both provincially and territorially, in order to ensure that all groups continue to do their good work.

I will start with Chief Adamek and then go to Mr. Maharaj if that's possible.

• (1835)

Regional Chief Kluane Adamek: I first want to acknowledge again that I did start my opening comments by noting the heightened political tensions that exist. If we could all just take a moment to sort of put those aside....

With respect to your question, this bill is to make sure, whichever government is elected moving forward, that there is accountability to ensure that we are advancing with conservation. I truly feel, political stripes aside, that this bill is in the interest of all Canadians. There need to be amendments, absolutely. However, if we don't have accountability for public funds with respect to advancing this work, then why are we even bothering with conservation at all?

I recognize that there's time, but in the place that I come from in the Yukon, you finish the conversation because it is important to hear the voices. So, thank you, Mr. Chair. I acknowledge that this is your process. I come from a different process, one that is Tlingit, and you talk until the work is done.

If I have a chance to come back, I will answer the rest of your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Well, I think the process is dovetailed. I think we had a good discussion because of the quality of the witnesses and the the questions that were asked.

So, I want to thank the witnesses, especially those who travelled to be here. This has been very informative. I found it very stimulating. We'll be ready when the bill comes.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Mr. Chair, what are we doing on Monday?

The Chair: We'll be providing guidance to the analysts for the sustainable development study report. I want to keep working on the draft report from the appearances of the oil company CEOs. There's also the possibility of looking at the report on the caribou. There'll be an opportunity for members to present motions. It's going to be more of a housekeeping kind of meeting.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Mr. Chair, could I just ask about the caribou report, because it has a time limit? It's time sensitive due to the decree. The public consultation, to my understanding, is already over. I think it would be wise for our committee to ensure that we contribute, since we spent that much time as a committee reviewing it. It should be the top priority to make sure that we contribute to that process.

The Chair: What I would suggest is that you bring both reports, and we can decide on the spot then, because I don't think we have time for a debate. Bring both reports, and we can talk about it.

Ms. Collins.

Ms. Laurel Collins: I'm sorry. I missed the very beginning. You were talking about the agenda for Monday, and I just wanted to make sure that it's—

The Chair: Witnesses, please feel free to leave the table.

Go ahead, Ms. Collins. Sorry.

Ms. Laurel Collins: For the agenda for Monday, I just want to make people aware and also to flag for the chair that if you're creating an agenda, I will be moving the motion on the net-zero accelerator to get further on redactions.

The Chair: Yes, thank you.

As I say, it's pretty flexible at the moment, but I guess the main point is that we're not having witnesses on a particular topic. It's going to be an in camera meeting, basically, on committee business.

Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Just—

Ms. Laurel Collins: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, I was interrupted, but I think I still have the floor.

I'm also intending to table my energy poverty motion and also have a discussion about reporting to the House.

I just want to flag that for you and for the committee if there is an agenda being made up.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Just so Ms. Collins knows, the Conservatives will be supporting the 360 pages that were ripped out of the net-zero accelerator contract.

The Chair: We can talk about that on Monday.

In the meantime, I wish you all a very good rest of the day and a good weekend.

The meeting is adjourned.

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