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Chair: Mr. Joël Lightbound



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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 39 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry and Technology.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, June 1, 2022, the committee is meeting to study Bill C-235, An Act respecting the building of a green economy in the Prairies.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022.

You all know the rules, so please follow them whether you are in the room or participating remotely.

Before we get started, I'd like to note that we have with us here, in Ottawa, Rémy Trudel, an adjunct professor at the École nationale d'administration publique, or ENAP, and a former minister in the Quebec government who oversaw a number of portfolios.

Mr. Trudel, thank you for being here.

[*Applause*]

He has brought his master students at ENAP with him. Welcome to the House of Commons and to the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology.

I just want to let the committee members and those watching our proceedings know that Manitoba's Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade, Cliff Cullen, was supposed to be here, but unfortunately something came up, so he won't be with us for the first hour, as planned.

We will therefore start with the panel scheduled for the third hour. From the Alberta Beef Producers, we have Dr. Melanie Wowk, chair, and Mark Lyseng, lead, government relations and policy, who are both joining us by video conference.

We also have Dale Austin, head of government relations at Cameco Corporation, and from the Canadian Cattle Association, Dennis Laycraft, executive vice-president, and more than likely Tyler Fulton, officer at large, both of whom will be joining us by video conference.

Before we hear from the witnesses, I'm going to turn the floor over to the clerk to preside over the election of a vice-chair.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chair, do you know for sure whether all the sound checks have been done and whether all the requirements have been met?

The Chair: We'll make sure of it before we hear from the witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Now I'll turn things over to the clerk.

[*English*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson): Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): I would like to propose the member for South Shore—St. Margarets, Rick Perkins, as vice-chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Andy Fillmore that Rick Perkins be elected as first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Rick Perkins duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Fillmore.

The Chair: Congratulations, Mr. Perkins. It's a pleasure to have you join the committee, and to have you as vice-chair. You have big feet to fill with Mr. Kram leaving us. Congratulations on this election.

In the spirit of this committee, we work very collaboratively, which is something I much appreciate. I look forward to working with you, Mr. Perkins.

Without further ado, if Dr. Wowk from Alberta Beef Producers is ready for a five-minute testimony, the floor is hers.

Dr. Melanie Wowk (Chair, Alberta Beef Producers): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the House of Commons of Canada Standing Committee on Industry and Technology for the chance to speak on behalf of the Alberta Beef Producers today.

My name is Melanie Wowk. I am a veterinarian and rancher from Beauvallon in Alberta. I am here today as the chair of the Alberta Beef Producers, an elected producer-led organization representing 18,000 producers. ABP's government relations and policy lead, Mark Lyseng, is also here with us today. My children and I will be fifth-generation stewards of the land and, along with my husband, represent the Métis nation.

I hope that you all have had the pleasure of driving through our prairie landscape and experiencing its beauty. When you see prairies, true rolling prairies with native grassland communities, that land is managed by beef producers. As one of those beef producers, I am excited to see attention going towards greening the prairie economies.

Our industry perfectly fits as an economy-generating industry that provides environmental benefits. Beef producers are stewards of the land, holding a unique symbiotic relationship with the rangelands we manage. We invest and work diligently to ensure our rangelands are healthy. A healthy rangeland provides forage for our cattle. The rangeland, the entire ecosystem and society benefit from these healthy native ecosystems, as they support the sequestration of carbon, the purification of water and the maintenance of critical wildlife habitat.

Grasslands are woefully undervalued in their contribution to the carbon cycle. It's estimated that, globally, grasslands store approximately 34% of the terrestrial stock of carbon. What's great about grasslands is that most of the carbon they store is below ground—about 97%—which safeguards it from disturbances such as fire. Unfortunately, if these grasslands are tilled for cultivated land or developed for housing, up to 50% of the carbon storage is lost forever.

Cattle, being continually amazing, convert plant protein on marginal lands not suitable for cultivation into the nutrient-dense protein source we consume. The cattle industry also provides more than just carbon storage and sequestration. The Prairie Conservation Forum wrote in 2021 that without native prairie, “there is no wildlife”. We certainly see our share of wildlife on our ranch, and many species look to beef producers' pastures for habitat.

In fact, in Alberta, 85% of the species at risk are found on native grasslands. Many of these species are endangered because of habitat loss, which includes an estimated 74% loss of Alberta's grassland habitat. Beef producers have safeguarded the remaining grasslands and the ecological goods and services they provide through our daily practices. In this way, our industry is unique. We are compatible with native ecosystems and add economic value to the maintenance of these ecosystems.

In Alberta, beef producers contribute over \$4 billion to the provincial GDP, including \$2.7 billion in labour income, and the cattle sector generates over 55,000 jobs, each of these yielding another 2.7 jobs elsewhere in the economy. We are an industry that is continually moving forward, striving for efficiencies and more ef-

fective management practices—we have to, to allow our businesses to survive.

We've seen continued evolution in range management, even in my time as a rancher. We are producing more pounds of beef using less feed and less water. These positive moves are driven by farmer and rancher passion for their craft and, in many cases, are supported by producer organizations and industry initiatives and through research such as our living labs partnership with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

There have been many changes on Alberta's rangelands over the last decades, from the adoption of rotational grazing methods to shifts in cattle genetics. Other subtle shifts include those of some ranchers in the province who voluntarily transformed their traditional fencing into pronghorn antelope-friendly fencing, for example, to allow the safe migration of the species.

In recent years, industry-driven initiatives such as certification through the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef and Verified Beef Production Plus have acted as a benchmark for producers. These initiatives push us to improve management practices while exploring new possibilities in marketing.

There are numerous examples of how farmers and ranchers, industry and government have worked and continue to work together to support the continuity of the rangelands and the environment, and these partnerships can definitely be successful.

• (1540)

To succeed, we first need to acknowledge the significant positive contributions of prairie grasslands in all green economy and environmental discussions. It is widely acknowledged that forested lands offer much in sequestration, but we often overlook the native prairie.

We also need to consider the varied opportunities for producers, based on their ecoregion, the native species present and the habitats they're supporting, as well as their business models. In other words, collaborative initiatives cannot have a blanket approach. They must either be flexible to a large region or specific to the local communities and individuals involved.

To achieve all of that, we need to give beef producers, who are the proud champions of the varied prairie ecosystems, and Canadian agricultural leaders a seat at the table. The agriculture industry needs to be involved in the collaboration right from goal development through to implementation and assessment. The beef industry of Alberta would like to contribute.

Thank you again, Chair and standing committee members.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Wowk.

We'll now turn to Cameco Corporation with Mr. Austin, who is with us here today.

Mr. Austin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Dale Austin (Head, Government Relations, Cameco Corporation): Thank you very much. Good afternoon.

It's my pleasure to appear at committee today on behalf of Cameco Corporation to provide input to your study on Bill C-235.

The bill and the committee's study of it are of particular interest to Cameco. Headquartered in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Cameco is one of the world's largest producers of uranium for nuclear energy and is the world's largest publicly traded uranium company. We're uniquely situated with operations across the nuclear fuel cycle, including in mining, refining, conversion and fuel manufacturing. The majority of our operations are located in Saskatchewan and Ontario, and our total Canadian workforce stands at just over 2,900 employees and long-term contractors.

Cameco is a proud and important part of Canada's nuclear and critical mineral supply chains, which deliver reliable, emissions-free electricity in Ontario, New Brunswick, and around the world. Canada's uranium and nuclear fuel sectors already play a significant role in underpinning green, low-carbon economies and are positioned to lead the transition to net-zero emissions by providing highly skilled, well-paying jobs; engaging suppliers in a wide range of skilled trades and expertise; and stimulating innovation in a variety of nuclear disciplines, including small modular reactors.

Cameco is well positioned to provide input to and support the development of a framework for a green prairie economy that considers all forms of low-carbon energy and the role they will play in electricity generation and in industrial and transportation-related emissions reductions.

As the committee considers what building a green economy in the Prairies might entail, we must also recognize that indigenous partnerships and indigenous businesses will play a major role. As you may be aware, Cameco is one of the largest employers of indigenous people in Canada, with about half the workforce at our mines and mills in northern Saskatchewan being residents from within the region. Beyond employment, over 80% of the services used at Cameco's mines and mills in northern Saskatchewan, totalling more than \$4 billion since 2004, are procured from northern indigenous businesses.

Our success depends on the long-term, positive partnerships and mutual trust we've built with first nations and Métis communities where we operate, particularly in northern Saskatchewan. A green economy in the Prairies will also require indigenous partnerships and strong indigenous businesses along the entire value chain to maximize future success.

A significant number of economic, energy, environmental and national security policies being pursued by the Government of Canada, including the contents of this bill, are focused on achieving net-zero emissions. It is Cameco's view that there is no path to net zero without nuclear energy. We were pleased to see nuclear energy mentioned in the content of the framework; I might, however, disagree with its characterization as a new source of energy.

Access to significant amounts of reliable, emissions-free baseload electricity is the foundation for any green economy. Current use of nuclear energy worldwide helps the planet avoid some 2.5 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions every year. Cameco

is very proud of our contribution to global greenhouse gas reduction efforts from our home base in Saskatoon. Saskatchewan uranium facilitates the generation of clean, carbon-free baseload electricity that will power the transition to a low-carbon economy.

That said, there are mixed signals coming from the federal government regarding the use of nuclear technologies to achieve climate goals and to support the transition to a green economy. The Government of Canada's climate policy framework clearly includes nuclear energy in its clean and low-carbon technology definition; however, recent decisions that excluded nuclear technologies from the tax rate reduction for zero-emission technology manufacturing and Canada's green bond framework send mixed signals to markets and investors.

Nuclear energy is a clean, carbon-free source of electricity. We ask that as the framework for a green Prairie economy is being developed, governments take a technology-agnostic approach and consider all emissions reduction technologies on a level playing field for inclusion in government programs and investments. The most effective path to a low-carbon economy will require the targeted, fit-for-purpose use of all types of zero-emission energy technologies.

• (1545)

Canada's and the Prairies' resource wealth has long been a major driver of our financial health, socio-economic well-being and job creation efforts. The bill's proposal to develop a framework for a green prairie economy could provide an opportunity to enhance and modernize the prairie resource sector's economic contributions and solidify our reputation as a responsible resource developer that meets the standards of ESG investors. Canada's economic prosperity is, to a significant extent, linked to our ability to responsibly and sustainably develop and export our abundant natural resources and the value-added products that are produced from them.

Cameco supports the intent of Bill C-235, which is to work with provincial governments, indigenous governing bodies and the private sector to develop a framework for a green prairie economy. We ask that all zero-emission technologies, including nuclear, be given the same consideration as the framework is being developed.

Thank you.

• (1550)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Without further ado, we will hear from our last representatives.

Mr. Laycraft or Mr. Fulton, please go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Tyler Fulton (Officer at Large, Canadian Cattle Association): Good afternoon, and thank you for having us today.

I'm Tyler Fulton, a beef cattle producer based in Birtle, Manitoba. I'm currently the president of the Manitoba Beef Producers, and an officer at large with the Canadian Cattle Association. I'm honoured to be here today to discuss the opportunities in the Prairies to build a green economy, and how that impacts cattle producers.

Beef cattle production in the prairie provinces represents a large portion of our sector, and one of the largest economic contributors in the region. We, in the beef cattle industry, are proud to be one of Canada's largest agricultural sectors, supporting 348,000 jobs and contributing \$21.8 billion to GDP, while also conserving 44 million acres of important grassland ecosystem that stores 1.5 billion tonnes of carbon.

However, it doesn't stop there. Beef cattle production in Canada is leading the way internationally in terms of sustainable production practices. While production methods differ by region and landscape, our goal is aligned—to contribute to Canada's economy, while conserving and protecting Canada's environmental landscape. It is in the best interests of beef farmers and ranchers to preserve the environment, so we are always striving for continuous improvement.

The Canadian beef advisers, alongside the robust membership of the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, made scientifically sound environment goals leading into 2030. These goals are ambitious but measurable, and we have a plan for how we can achieve these goals.

We are committed to continuous improvement and leaving the environment in a better position for the next generation of beef cattle producers: for example, a 33% emissions intensity reduction by 2030, sequestering an additional 3.4 million tonnes of carbon every year, and maintaining 35 million acres of native grasslands. These efforts have us excited about both the environmental and the economic future of Canada's beef industry.

When we look specifically at Bill C-235 and developing a framework for a green prairie economy, we have a few comments for the committee's consideration.

First, it is essential to include cattle producers during the development phase. The Prairies have a large agriculture economic presence, and primary producers are the subject matter experts. Including agricultural advisers will be key for long-lasting success.

Second, the Canadian beef sector is confident in our 2030 goals, and we recommend that any framework be built by starting with industry-led goals. This will ensure that we're working toward achieving shared objectives with an incentive-based approach.

As innovation and research continue around sustainability, there are tools coming to light that do have some public good. However, these result in added costs for producers. I need to emphasize that primary producers cannot pass these costs along, which will make the tools economically unsustainable. Looking to install those tools

in a regular practice will not happen on its own, and a regulatory push would be costly and generally ineffective. We've seen how a regulatory approach drives up costs, and exports production to other jurisdictions.

Canada has one of the leading sustainable beef production systems in the world, with less than half the global greenhouse gas emission average. If there are regulatory and cost burdens on producers, it becomes unattainable to maintain production effectively in Canada. This will have a negative impact on our domestic and global food security. It will also have a severe negative consequence on Canada's landscapes, without producers stewarding the land with their cattle.

• (1555)

Third, with regard to the content under paragraph 3(3)(c) in Bill C-235, it talks about "prioritizing projects that generate natural infrastructure and a clean environment". Given the landscape that cattle graze in the Prairies, we strongly encourage cattle production to be included, given our positive contribution to biodiversity, temperate native grasslands, and the many species at risk that live on these pasture lands.

When we're discussing "greening the economy" in the Prairies, the temperate native grasslands are a key consideration. While Bill C-235 mentions forests and forestry multiple times, there is no reference to grasslands. Analysis by the Nature Conservancy of Canada shows that, on average, over the past 25 years, roughly 148,000 acres of temperate native grasslands were lost through conversion each year. This doesn't include the tame pastures and haylands, which are also being lost at similar rates. These losses are detrimental to key environment and climate change objectives. In fact, a recent study by Nature United identified stopping this loss as the number one solution we have for natural climate solutions.

Canadian cattle producers are well positioned to be a part of the climate change solution and to help conserve these grasslands, while contributing to Canada's economy.

On that note, I would invite members of the committee to watch the short documentary entitled *Guardians Of The Grasslands*. It is available online, and we can share the film with committee members following today's meeting.

Thank you very much for your time today. We look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fulton.

If you could provide the link to this documentary to the committee via the clerk, that would be much appreciated.

[Translation]

We'll begin the discussion now.

Mrs. Wagantall will start things off with six minutes.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you so much, Chair.

I appreciate all of you being here today. I'm here as a member of Parliament for Saskatchewan.

I'm very pleased to have you here, Mr. Austin, as well as to hear about the grasslands because, clearly, there's much going on in our province in regard to protecting our environment and ensuring that it is there for generations to come in the way that it should be.

With our agriculture, oil and gas, manufacturing, our opportunities with SMRs, critical minerals and potash, we are a wealthy place that has much to offer to Canada. The wonderful thing about it is that we offer it in a way that is very sustainable and we are concerned with the protection of our environment.

As I ask you guys questions.... I've heard bits and pieces of all that you are already doing. Something that grieves my heart quite often is that I don't feel there is that recognition of where we are now. As we just heard from Tyler, the future plans continue to do even more.

Mr. Austin, you mentioned your frustration with the term "new source of energy". Could you elaborate briefly for us why that causes angst for you?

Mr. Dale Austin: In the context of this bill, it was mentioned as a new source simply because nuclear power doesn't exist in the Prairies as yet, but Canada has a long history of producing nuclear energy. It has close to seven decades of being in the nuclear energy business. I believe we were the second country in the world to produce clean nuclear power.

Sometimes it's important to point out to people that we have a long history in this industry. We do it very well. We're very good at it and we are active all along the nuclear supply chain in this country.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: I appreciate that very much. Thank you.

I also appreciate the opportunities that I and my colleagues have had to meet with the various indigenous businesses that are up north and that you're working with. That's exemplary, and we look forward to that growing as the opportunities increase for you guys.

I would like to ask Tyler.... He mentioned the *Guardians Of The Grasslands* video, which I was going to mention. I'm glad that he did it first, quite honestly, because it is remarkable. I think it would give this committee a clear understanding of how important those grasslands are.

Bill C-235 focuses on emissions reduction, which is a continued focus of the government. From your perspective, what work is happening in your sector on emissions reduction? Are there other environment issues that we should be focusing on, as well, to include ecosystems, biodiversity and whatnot?

• (1600)

Mr. Tyler Fulton: Thank you for the question.

When talking about emissions reductions, we are already doing a ton of research and development in that realm, and we have been for decades, as a matter of fact. A lot of that is because it aligns very closely with improving the efficiencies of our operations. What I mean by that is improvements in feeding efficiency of the animals or, for example, reproductive efficiencies. That is, can we produce more beef? We are effectively producing more beef from the same number of animals.

By realizing those production benefits, we're also reducing our greenhouse gas footprint intensity for pounds of beef produced.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Dr. Melanie Wowk, you were talking about how carbon sink is important in the grasslands. Could you elaborate a little bit more on how important it is to have that ranching element on our grasslands and the dynamic that it plays in ensuring that we continue to grow that carbon sink in a very effective and good way?

Dr. Melanie Wowk: Thank you.

Large grazing species are extremely important in maintaining the carbon. As I mentioned, if we break that land up, we lose 50% of the carbon and don't get it back. We need large grazing species on those pastures. The grazing and their production on the land maintain that carbon sink.

I think it's often forgotten, in that part of the ecosystem, just how much carbon is maintained in that soil.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Right.

Ag in Motion is the largest outdoor ag program in Canada. It's held in Saskatchewan. I'd encourage all the members here to make that part of a trip at some point, as well. It's amazing what's going on, innovatively, in Saskatchewan.

The Canadian Foodgrains Bank was there. They talked about the work they're doing in Ethiopia, which is a reflection of our values here in Canada. They're working with these small farmers who were protecting their own land for their grazing because there was so little to graze on. Eventually they convinced them they were better off to have all their animals grazing together because of the impact of those animals on increasing the pasture land.

Are you familiar with that at all, increasing the root systems and the amount of pasture land available in those circumstances?

Dr. Melanie Wowk: Yes, we do quite a bit of grazing where it's timed grazing. It's on small pieces of land and the cattle are moved every few days or however it works in that producer's system. That definitely increases the productivity of the land as well as the cattle.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to ask Mark Lyseng, our government relations person, to continue on with that, if that's all right.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mark's on mute, I think.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we can't hear him. Hopefully we can get back to him at a later time.

We're out of time, Mrs. Wagantall.

We'll try to figure out the sound issue and get back to you in another round of questions.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

We now go to Mr. Gaheer for six minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. Thank you to all the witnesses for making time for the committee.

My questions are for Dr. Wowk.

I was actually quite surprised by this testimony today. When someone in my shoes thinks about the beef industry, it doesn't really come across as a very green industry.

Could you maybe talk about some of the steps that the industry has taken, maybe over the last five or 10 years, to become more green?

• (1605)

Dr. Melanie Wowk: Thank you.

I believe Tyler answered that question very well. We have done it through improved genetics, improved feed efficiency, improved grazing management and forages. We really have increased the amount of beef that we produce. In the last 20 years, we've produced much more beef on much less land using much less water.

I think that probably has been our biggest contributing factor to improving our environmental impact.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Great. Thank you.

You mentioned, I think, that 85% of the species on the grasslands are at risk. I understand that correlation isn't always causation, but is it that some of the farming practices themselves are leading to species and habitat loss?

Dr. Melanie Wowk: Definitely.

I think our point here is that the loss of the grasslands.... That's what those species rely on to survive. As those grasslands are shrinking, whether that be from farming, cultivating the land or urban spread, the amount of land that they are able to survive on has been reduced.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: As the socio-economic standing of the world increases, the demand for meat also increases. How do we reconcile that with saving habitat and saving species, but also an increase in demand that requires more resources, more land and more water?

What does the industry think about that?

Dr. Melanie Wowk: There actually is an increase in demand for animal products and animal protein across the world. As I said, we are continually trying to improve the amount of beef that we can produce with less land and less water.

The other thing is that the importance of having large grazing species is this: These wildlife species tend to congregate where our cattle are. Deer prefer to be on a pasture that has been grazed by

cattle than to be on one where the grass is very old and hasn't been grazed. We have such a symbiotic relationship with wildlife. It can be difficult at times, because obviously they are often competing with our cattle for limited resources, but definitely we have a symbiotic relationship with wildlife.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: I saw a documentary that looked at how grazing happens in America and at the open ponds where defecation will go. How is the waste from the animals handled when you're concentrating so many animals in one spot? How is it handled in your province?

Dr. Melanie Wowk: As far as grazing is concerned, we have to be careful with where we graze. We can't put our animals on rivers or lakes or things like that. The manure as well as the urine from cattle act as mineral.... Urine provides nitrogen to the soil and many different benefits for the soil.

I think that question is probably more in regard to intensive live-stock-type operations, where there is a larger amount of fecal matter, so I'll go to Dennis on that.

Mr. Dennis Laycraft (Executive Vice-President, Canadian Cattle Association): Thanks, Melanie.

As we look at the larger feeding operations, as you build those facilities, there's almost as much money spent on the actual landscaping of those operations as on the rest of the facilities. The drains are such that all the drainage will go directly in the lagoons, where that water is stored. Increasingly, we're starting now to see more biodigesters that are being built, where that will then be converted into some gas production, but you'll effectively be getting another strain of nutrients in the form of fertilizers that are coming out of it.

I will say that the other thing we're seeing a lot more is that there's a lot of work with Birds Canada and Ducks Unlimited. We're setting up solar water so that cattle are not actually going into the sloughs or the dugouts to drink but are going to that water. That also helps with the nesting cycle. A lot of joint projects like that are becoming very common, not just in the Prairies but across Canada.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Great.

Thank you so much.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gaheer.

It's now Mr. Lemire's turn for six minutes.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I, too, would like to acknowledge the fact that we have Rémy Trudel here. You may or may not know that he was the member of the National Assembly who represented Rouyn-Noranda—Témiscamingue at one point in time. When I was a young activist, he was one of the first people whose influence helped shape the course of my life, opening the door to politics. He may be the reason why I am in this seat now.

Thank you, Mr. Trudel. I'd also like to thank your students for being with us and for being interested in the workings of the federal public administration.

Mr. Austin, you didn't necessarily come out against Bill C-235. On the contrary, I think you see it as a good thing.

What are the biggest economic challenges facing the prairie provinces right now?

Would Bill C-235 help you address those challenges. Why or why not?

[English]

Mr. Dale Austin: In my view, and I'll confine my comments to the energy sector, one of the main challenges on the prairies is looking for ways to make use of all forms of energy. This is not a situation where we are picking either-or. We are going to need all forms of energy into the future.

I believe the way it is presented in Bill C-235, to begin discussions about how that might be able to occur, is a very reasonable approach. In the confederation that we live in, the ability of the federal government to work with their provincial counterparts, with indigenous organizations and with industry will play a main role in whether or not this will be successful

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: What parts of Bill C-235 should be reworked?

Witnesses have told us that the bill adds red tape and puts pressure on industry and business.

Do you agree with that?

[English]

Mr. Dale Austin: That's a difficult question, because, as I read the bill, there is a significant amount of consultation and discussion that is part of that in order to come to what would be a final conclusion. I think there are ways to manage the bureaucratic burden, if I can put it that way, provided that each of the participants—governments, industry and indigenous groups—goes into the discussion with the desire to have a successful outcome.

As with any bill where you're asking people to come together over the course of a number of years to pull together a framework, there are opportunities, frankly, to put it on a siding. But if each participant goes into it with their eyes open and with the objective to come out with a plan for a green economy, then I think that is perfectly manageable.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: You represent the natural resources sector, which falls under provincial jurisdiction.

Does the fact that the federal government is using this bill to try to play a key role in driving prairie economies concern you? It will mean more players are involved and possibly a more cumbersome regulatory process, which your industry would have to deal with.

[English]

Mr. Dale Austin: I don't believe that's the intention of the bill at all. I believe the intention of the bill is to work together to come up with a plan to have a green economy in the Prairies that is successful, that minimizes the economic impacts of, in our case, energy

and resource development, and that increases the economic potential of the Prairies in the case of energy development.

If that is the objective of the bill, then I think that is a viable objective and one that we should be looking to attain.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: If I understand correctly, you view nuclear energy as a new green technology. That's in your brief.

Do I have that right?

[English]

Mr. Dale Austin: That is certainly what we believe as a company, that nuclear power must play a significant role in any transition to a green economy and that it will underpin the necessary electrification of those economies.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Are there any regulations or acts preventing you from leveraging nuclear energy expertise you wish was being used on the ground in the Prairies?

[English]

Mr. Dale Austin: I wouldn't say there are any that prevent it. Our nuclear regulator here in Canada, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, is a world-class regulator. They do an excellent job of maintaining the safety of the nuclear system.

We are very closely watching the Impact Assessment Act and the implementation of that act by the agency in terms of timelines for developing new projects that, in our case, would potentially include new uranium mines in northern Saskatchewan and the amount of time that might take.

Are there regulations that are preventing it? I would say no, but we are watching very closely the amount of time that getting through that regulatory system might take.

• (1615)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I'll be perfectly frank with you. Nuclear energy scares me a lot. We've seen quite a few nuclear disasters, and nuclear energy is not exactly well-regarded internationally.

I find the thought of more and more nuclear plants in Canada frightening, so what do you say to someone like me?

[English]

Mr. Dale Austin: I'm sorry that you're afraid of nuclear energy, frankly. It is, I think, a demonstrated, safe supplier of electricity around the world. Here in Ontario, where we are sitting, 60% of the electricity being generated is being generated by nuclear power.

As I mentioned in my remarks to Mrs. Wagantall, Canada has a long history of developing and producing nuclear energy, and we expect that to continue long into the future. We also believe that there is no path to net zero without nuclear power. We will require all forms of energy to get there, but nuclear energy has the potential to provide that clean, zero-emission baseload power that is required.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemire and Mr. Austin.

We now go to Mr. Masse.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses.

I'll start with the Alberta Beef Producers.

I commend your efforts with the tallgrass prairies. We have them in Windsor. There are only two places left in North America. My private member's bill looks to protect them. They're just city land, right now, but they're very rare and delicate.

I want to get this from you, specifically: Do you support Bill C-235 and its specifics? If not, why not? Are there improvements that can be made to the bill? That's what we're figuring out here—whether or not this is actually an improvement. I'd like your opinion on that.

Dr. Melanie Wowk: The beef producers of this province are focused on continually improving the sustainability of our industry. That is why we are very happy to be part of this discussion today.

We would like it to consider the environment, social responsibility and economic viability. I think Tyler made a very good point; for us to pursue it, it has to be economically viable. We are constantly evolving as an industry, and we look forward to continuing to do so. Being here today is really to emphasize the importance of the grasslands—their importance to the environment. We really can't afford to have them shrink any more.

Mr. Brian Masse: Does that mean you support the bill?

I appreciate this. It's been interesting testimony, because it has highlighted something that doesn't get a lot of attention, I think. It's new testimony for me.

However, do you support the bill? Are there a couple of amendments for the bill, or do you just not know? It's okay. I'm not trying to pin you down on anything in particular, but we're trying to figure out exactly where we all stand on this one.

Dr. Melanie Wowk: That's the difficult part for us. There isn't a whole lot of agriculture in the bill, but there's a lot related to forestry. I'm going to say that, right now, we're just trying to make sure we are at the table and able to give our input about how this bill could possibly work for our producers.

Mr. Brian Masse: That's a very fair answer.

What we've discovered through the process—we had Mr. Carr here, as well—is that there wasn't a lot of outreach to organizations,

so you're not alone. Your testimony is very valuable. You don't have to take a position right now. It's up to us to decide later what we do here.

Perhaps I will shift over to Mr. Austin.

With nuclear power, there's responsibility for what takes place afterwards. I've been involved in the nuclear deep repository in the Bruce area, which is causing quite an issue. Are you aware of the legacy cost there? When you're looking at nuclear... The United States has asked us to stop doing it there, because we're building a deep repository they oppose. It's right next to the Great Lakes, and the costing hasn't been factored in.

Is there a plan to do it differently? The whole community is ripped apart. In fact, the Saugeen First Nation rejected it. What ended up happening is that they decided to go next door and try to do it there. Is there anything in the model they're dealing with now, in terms of new nuclear, that's going to take into account all of the things that weren't planned for? A lot of this used to be secondary stuff—it's your coats, chairs and other stuff. Everything gets radioactive.

Please go ahead.

• (1620)

Mr. Dale Austin: I won't comment on the deep geologic repository and the discussions happening in Bruce, because I'm not familiar enough with it to comment.

I will say that, in terms of the discussion on spent fuel, nuclear waste or however you do it, it is a fully costed part of any nuclear facility. Dealing with our spent fuel or nuclear waste is already factored into the costs. It is stored safely on site at nuclear power plants in Canada and has been for many decades. If and when there is a deep geologic repository built, that will be a safe storage and retrieval opportunity for spent fuel.

Retrieval is important, because we use very little of the energy in a fuel bundle when it goes through a nuclear reactor. There are new technologies being developed that may be able to reuse that fuel and put it back and generate fuel. It is fully managed and well monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency, and this will continue to occur in the absence of a deep geologic repository.

Mr. Brian Masse: Unfortunately, I think the fourth one in the world just came online. There are three others. Two of them caught on fire. This is the length of the CN Tower into the ground next to the Great Lakes, so there's a lot of concern with it.

It's good to hear about the costing.

Those are all of my questions for now, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses. I appreciate your testimony.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Masse.

Go ahead, Mr. Kram. You have five minutes.

[*English*]

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

Thank you very much to all the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Austin, it's good to have you here in person. I'll begin with you.

Cameco is certainly checking a lot of check boxes that governments tend to look for. You are already transitioning to a low-carbon economy. You talked about indigenous partnerships and businesses that you're already working with, and then Bill C-235 comes along and refers to nuclear power as a new form of energy.

What do you really need from Bill C-235 to continue the work that you're doing? Would it be easier if the government just stayed out of your way and did not add a new level of bureaucratic burden that you have to deal with?

Mr. Dale Austin: That's a fair question. Thank you very much.

We could continue on our way and continue to do the good work we're doing. We are firm believers that, any time we can talk about our industry, the role that it plays, and the role that it plays in western Canada and Saskatchewan in particular, that's useful.

If there are tables where the federal government and the provincial government can sit down and work together with industry, those are also useful. As you know, it is sometimes challenging for all levels of government, industry, indigenous groups and the public to get on the same page. This is an important issue. An opportunity to have frank conversations about what might be possible is useful.

Could we do it without it? Yes, we probably could, but we would end up—or someone else would end up—being a convener of this type of conversation.

Mr. Michael Kram: Would it be possible to have these conversations without the legislation?

Mr. Dale Austin: I would say yes. It would be possible to have them without the legislation. The legislation, from my point of view, puts a finer point on the need and the desire to have these types of conversations among the various interested parties.

● (1625)

Mr. Michael Kram: You mentioned the Impact Assessment Act, and you had some concerns about the timelines that projects can take stemming from the Impact Assessment Act. I tend to be of the view that everyone comes to politics with good intentions and that there isn't the intention to add an additional layer of bureaucratic burden, but, with the Impact Assessment Act and with Bill C-235,

could we agree that there is at least the potential for additional bureaucratic burden as an unintended consequence?

Mr. Dale Austin: That is fair to say, yes. I think that I would agree with that as an unintended consequence.

Mr. Michael Kram: Could you elaborate on the indigenous partnerships that Cameco has for your business and how you established these partnerships in the first place? How did that all come about?

Mr. Dale Austin: It's been a long time coming. Over the entire more than 30-year existence of Cameco, we have been working with our local indigenous communities. It has been a long journey to get to where we are. We have been remarkably successful, I would say, in developing these relationships, but it has not been easy.

Currently we have 18 communities in northern Saskatchewan that are part of Cameco's collaboration or partnership agreements. They are based on five pillars: community engagement, business development, community investment, environmental stewardship and workforce development.

We cannot operate where we do in northern Saskatchewan without the support of our indigenous communities. They provide a significant number of services, and they are a very reliable workforce that we require. It takes time. It's based on trust, and it's based on open dialogue.

Mr. Michael Kram: Would it be fair to say that you achieved this success because of mutually beneficial economic interests and not necessarily compliance with any particular federal government law or program?

Mr. Dale Austin: I would say that it's more than mutually beneficial economic interests. I would say there are mutually beneficial economic, environmental and social interests. It runs the gamut. We identified early on that, without the support of the northern communities, we would not be successful. That is why we pursued it.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay. It wasn't to comply with this law or that law.

Mr. Dale Austin: I would say no.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay.

I think I'm out of time, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, you are. Thank you, Mr. Kram.

We'll now move to MP Dong for five minutes.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for coming to the committee today.

I first want to say that you're doing something very wise in joining the process early to give us advice on this very important bill; this is one of the few meetings we've had. We've heard different aspects. To me, the core or the spirit of this bill is development and consultation, so you're doing the right thing by being here and giving us advice.

First of all, it's on the record and everyone's clear, but I want to hear from all the witnesses. Do you believe that this bill is going to build collaboration—perhaps co-operation—between provincial, federal and municipal governments and industry partners to benefit the future prosperity of the Prairies? One by one, maybe witnesses can give me their very short answers.

Mr. Dale Austin: I believe it has the potential to do that.

Mr. Han Dong: Okay.

Go ahead, Ms. Wowk.

Dr. Melanie Wowk: Yes, I would hope so. Any time we have this type of collaboration, that's what we need: We need all the different sectors to come together. Especially for us, in being here, it's about developing some understanding of our business and what we're doing for our part. It's very good for me to see what everybody else is doing as well, so yes, definitely.

• (1630)

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you.

Next is Mr. Fulton.

Mr. Tyler Fulton: Yes, I would tend to agree.

As I think I said in my statement, we see this consultation process as really critical, because we struggle with making those connections and making sure that all parts of Canada, and urban areas in particular, understand the importance of cattle on the landscape and all of the great environmental benefits that come from that. As I mentioned in my statement, we are the prairie landscape experts, so to start with, I think that's the way to start.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you.

Next is Mr. Lyseng, followed by Mr. Laycraft.

Mr. Mark Lyseng (Lead, Government Relations and Policy, Alberta Beef Producers): Yes, I agree with Mel and what she said, in that it does provide that opportunity. I just think that as worded, we would like to see more recognition of agriculture, and a broader sweep of partners who might have been missed in this draft, but overall, collaboration, especially within our industry, is never a bad thing.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Laycraft.

Mr. Dennis Laycraft: I don't have a lot more to add to that.

I think it certainly has the potential to facilitate that level of collaboration. If you go to our national strategy, one of our key pillars is connectivity: When we harness that power of connectivity, that's when we definitely get the greatest results.

Mr. Han Dong: That's great.

My second big question is... We've heard a lot of concerns about this bill maybe leading to potential red tape for your industries. To avoid that, do you have any specific recommendations to this committee on how we perhaps can amend this bill so that we will stop that from happening with the bill right at the start?

Mr. Dennis Laycraft: Maybe I'll make one quick comment. Empowering people always has greater success than overpowering

people. The incentive-based approach is absolutely crucial to success.

Mr. Han Dong: Okay.

Mr. Tyler Fulton: I was going to echo the exact same thing. Beyond a greater consultative process, providing incentives as opposed to regulatory restrictions is a much more effective way, especially in the context of environmental benefits.

Mr. Han Dong: That's a good point.

Does anybody else want to chime in?

Mr. Mark Lyseng: My advice would be to avoid unintended consequences. As an example, beef producers have done a good job of sequestering and storing carbon, and incentivizing other practices. Not rewarding the good actors right now always leaves a bad taste in those producers' mouths.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you.

My third question—

The Chair: I'm sorry, MP Dong. This is all the time we have, but we might have some time at the end, so keep that question in mind.

[*Translation*]

Now it's over to Mr. Lemire for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Austin, I'd like to pick up where we left off.

Obviously, there are concerns around nuclear waste and safety.

Where do things stand today?

[*English*]

Mr. Dale Austin: I'm sorry. Could you repeat the question? I missed the middle part.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Can you comment on safety in relation to nuclear waste?

If you want us to pursue more nuclear energy production, that waste will obviously have to be stored. Nuclear waste is said to be radioactive for 500 million years.

How should that waste be stored to ensure everyone's safety?

[*English*]

Mr. Dale Austin: As I mentioned earlier, we are already safely storing spent fuel on site at nuclear power plants here in Canada. That waste is monitored 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, by the International Atomic Energy Agency. It is fully costed.

There is no reason to suspect it will be any different as we continue to produce nuclear power into the future. There is a safe storage capability that exists in Canada right now, and we will continue to avail ourselves of it.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Nuclear energy is a very costly option that offers little in the way of flexibility, so the maintenance of facilities can be unpredictable. Everything in life has an element of risk, but when it comes to nuclear energy, the consequences can be disastrous, unimaginable even.

Those who oppose nuclear power plants are worried mainly about health and safety and the storage of radioactive waste.

What can you tell us about the repercussions nuclear energy can have on human health?

It's practically impossible to keep everything that's released on a nuclear storage site, particularly because of the wind, and the environmental consequences are tremendous.

What do you say to people who oppose nuclear energy because of health concerns?

[*English*]

Mr. Dale Austin: What I would say to those people is that here in Ontario, where this meeting is taking place, nuclear energy replaced coal as one of the major electricity producers in this province. During that transition from coal to nuclear, the number of smog days in Toronto went from roughly 40-50 a year down to zero, and it has been consistently at zero since coal was replaced in Ontario. There are benefits, greenhouse gas benefits, certainly, but also air quality benefits in the transition to nuclear power.

We recognize there are concerns with nuclear energy. We work very hard to try to allay those concerns, but there will always be people, like yourself, who fear our technology. We will try to work with you to allay some of your fears, because we believe it is a certain part of any net-zero future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I was asking you those questions in good faith.

Thank you for your answers.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to Mr. Masse for two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I didn't get a chance to ask the Canadian Cattle Association specifically about Bill C-235, whether they support the bill. I think they do, but I want to make sure they get an opportunity to respond, as well.

Mr. Tyler Fulton: Well, I'd say that as cattle producers we really consider ourselves to be the original environmentalists. To that degree, when we see a bill that has “green economy” for the Prairies, in particular, it seems to check lots of boxes for us. Of course, the devil would be in the details.

Mr. Brian Masse: Is it less about the bill and more about consultation, or is it about the bill creating this more structured consultation? Is it fair to put it that way?

Even if you take the bill out of the equation, you still want better consultation and process. Is it fair enough to say that you're intrigued by the potential of the bill?

Mr. Tyler Fulton: To both points I'd say yes.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Those are my questions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

It's now over to Mrs. Wagantall for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you so much, Chair.

I appreciate listening here to the conversation going on at this moment. We're hearing a lot about consultation. The bill actually says, “In developing the framework, the Minister must consult” government, all of the ministers, indigenous bodies and the private sector. I am concerned because the responsibility for developing the framework is with the federal government. What I'm hearing is that you'll be consulted, which is a step forward—I honestly say that.

For the elephant in the room, the reality is that my province and I think the prairie provinces have not felt heard, listened to, or respected in regard to the work. This is what I'm hearing from you today, especially the cattlemen and Mr. Austin. You do a great deal and continue to do a great deal. If there's opportunity for communication and to work together, that's a good thing.

However, I'm reading a note from this past summer when the federal government met in Saskatoon with territorial and provincial counterparts and stakeholders to develop what's known as the agricultural policy framework—because the federal government does have a role. They discussed how governments can help the agriculture industry reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and become more climate-resilient. Those are good words, and yet I hear from you about all of the things the cattlemen's association has been doing for a long time, yet there's been no recognition of that in this process of developing this green Prairies concept. What I hear from you is that incentives are important, rather than being denied an opportunity to consult and be part of the process, and to do what you know best.

Am I hearing you right on that to some degree? I know it's a tricky circumstance. You're being asked if you support this bill today. I think what I'm hearing is that you want to support working together, and that needs to be done. There is also a certain level of accountability that belongs to my province, for sure, in Saskatchewan, in developing the resources that are there, which of course make a difference in this entire country when it comes to our GDP and the wealth of our nation.

I would first of all ask the cattlemen's association folks this: How important is that whole area of incentives? They say here that they want to do a pilot for those “who adopt environmental practices that also reduce production risks.” I can't think of any other business that is more concerned about the environment and ensuring that they protect that environment while also reducing risks to their production.

• (1640)

Mr. Tyler Fulton: I think you fully understand the cattle sector across Canada.

I'll add one item that hasn't been mentioned previously. One of the other environmental goods that come from cattle on the landscape is that we make the landscape more resilient to climate change by virtue of protecting against fires—we actually have a good video resource for that as well—or flooding. I can reference it directly from Manitoba this year that those pasturelands make the whole landscape more resilient to the effects of climate change.

To go back to your point about incentives, it's really more about recognition, as Mark mentioned earlier. It's recognition of the fact that these are the awesome environmental benefits that come from having cattle on the landscape. They're just not going to be there if we as cattle farmers and ranchers aren't there.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: As an example, Tyler, to reach out to you.... As you say, you really are the experts.

I know there was a case where grazing was shut down because there was a concern with how it was impacting other species. They especially mentioned the grouse. Then, when they got that grass growing as tall as it did, the grouse left because historically grasslands have been grazed. It was not a beneficial thing to shut down the grazing on those grasslands.

Are you familiar with that kind of concept?

Mr. Tyler Fulton: Absolutely. You're referencing, in particular, Grasslands National Park in southern Saskatchewan. It took them a decade to understand the importance of that symbiosis. It's a thing—

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: The ranchers had already understood that.

Mr. Tyler Fulton: Yes, that's exactly what I was going to say. You've captured it.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Is there anything else from those who participated this morning on the ranching side of the equation? It's true there's not enough reference here to our grasslands and how crucial they are to our healthy environment.

Dr. Melanie Wolk: I just wanted to add that when being asked to do this, oftentimes we're put in a defensive position of the things people think we're doing. It's just been very refreshing to come here and be able to explain the good things that we do, the good things our cattle do, and how important the environment is to us and to our businesses.

I would just like to thank the committee for that.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now turn to Mr. Fillmore for the last five minutes of questions.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thanks, Chair.

Thanks very much to the witnesses for joining us, in person and virtually, and for your time and your expertise today. It's been a fascinating discussion.

I spent a great deal of time on the small modular reactor file, and I agree with you that it's going to be a part of our green mix in the future. The grasslands conversation has been entirely new to me, and I'm really happy to learn about the cattle industry and the importance of the grasslands. Thank you for enlightening us in that way.

We are living in a time when extreme weather events and natural disasters are increasing in severity and frequency. In my part of the country, we just lived through hurricane Fiona. On the other coast, there were heat domes and forest fires. In your part of the world, it's drought. We know that cattle ranchers have faced critical shortages of feed and water when they're supplying their herds for the winter.

I'd just like to do a poll of the three witness groups. Would you agree that we need to recognize the importance of building a green economy in the Prairies to combat the climate change that is creating this hardship for the cattle producers?

Maybe we'll start with the Alberta group, please.

Dr. Melanie Wolk: Definitely, we agree that we have to be a part of this conversation, but at the end of the day we have to remember that beef production in Canada represents 2.4% of the total greenhouse gas emissions. Oftentimes we look at that, but we forget....

That's part of the reason why we came here. We've forgotten about the other end of the equation, which is where someone like me—the cow-calf producer—sits, and which is what we're doing with carbon, with grasslands, with trees and with everything else. Part of our reason for being here is that even though we are such a small part of it, we are still continually willing to try to work toward improving it.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thanks for that.

Could we go to the Canadian Cattle Association on the question of the hardship the industry is facing because of extreme weather, drought and so forth? What are your feelings on whether what this bill proposes would mitigate the impacts of climate change through efforts to green the economy?

Mr. Tyler Fulton: We're living climate change weekly, it seems, if not annually. I can say that the eastern part of the Prairies was impacted by pretty significant flooding this year as well. We're just seeing major shifts one way or the other. Critically, we need systems that make us all more resilient. To the degree that this bill would help with that, we're definitely supportive.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thanks for that.

Speaking of systems, one of the elements of the bill is to work together to improve transportation systems. Would you then agree that we need to recognize the importance of improving transportation systems so that we can distribute food and water supplies in a much more predictable manner, and then of course get the product to market when that time comes?

Let's again start with the Alberta group.

Dr. Melanie Wolk: Transportation is a nightmare for us right now, whether it's getting our cattle around or whether it's getting feed to cattle. I don't know if everybody remembers the potential rail strike we faced last December. That really scared us.

Definitely, transportation is something that we have to look at. It seems that post-COVID, it's just gone into a tailspin. We are definitely looking for help in that area as well.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thanks.

Can I hear from the Canadian Cattle Association?

Mr. Tyler Fulton: As I said, our members are living it. I would also reference the rail failures that happened when the heavy flooding happened in the Lower Mainland, and even in the interior of B.C. after the droughts and forest fires last year. That really upended the supply chain for many of our members. Those types of strategic infrastructure investments are critical to being more resilient to our changing climate.

• (1650)

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thanks for that.

If anyone else on the screen would like to jump in on the importance of building a green economy or improving transportation systems, I would give you the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Dennis Laycraft: Maybe I can put my hand up.

It isn't all just infrastructure, as we move on this. I know of one company that has 40 trucks sitting today because they cannot get drivers. All of these other things are important, but we do need to address that labour issue. It's very critical across Canada, but I know that it's very critical in the Prairies, where you have vast distances where products need to be transported.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thanks for that.

I've directed the questions so far to the grasslands, but Mr. Austin, if you have any comment on any of that, it would be great.

Mr. Dale Austin: Just very quickly, the green economy is important not only in the Prairies but also across the country. The more carbon we can remove from our economy, the more global opportunities will be available to us.

In terms of transportation, we're a trading nation. We need to be able to move our goods to market as quickly as possible. We need to have the right regulatory and policy frameworks in place to make sure that it can happen. Any time we can look with a fresh eye on all of the components of what moving goods to market in a green economy might look like, I think that's beneficial.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Given that we had a bit of a change of schedule, we have a little more time. We've concluded our formal round of questions, but if anyone has any more questions, I will cede the floor to them.

Yes, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to ask a few questions.

My questions will all be directed to Mr. Austin.

Mr. Austin, when your company wants to or needs to alter or develop a new site for mining or the production of uranium, does it, and do you, consult with stakeholders before doing that?

Mr. Dale Austin: Yes. For the most part, we would consult in particular with our partner communities in northern Saskatchewan, but with other interested parties as well.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Could you just inform the committee about what types of stakeholders you would be talking to?

Mr. Dale Austin: As I said, it most likely would be with our indigenous community. We would talk to the regulator, both provincial and federal, and an open consultation process goes along with that sort of regulatory siting process.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You'd be dealing with all three levels of government, as well, in that consultation process.

Mr. Dale Austin: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Of course, part of that is what you would naturally want to do to be a good corporate citizen to move the project forward. I presume, particularly with first nations, that some of that is in compliance with the duty to consult rulings of the courts.

Mr. Dale Austin: Yes, it is part of the duty to consult, but we were engaged in discussions and consultations with our indigenous partners before it became part of the law. It is part of how we do business in northern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Is any of that required already by the various regulators you have to deal with?

Mr. Dale Austin: I wouldn't say it's required. It is certainly required from a company perspective. As part of the regulatory process, there is an opportunity for any engaged group to participate in that regulatory process, which is run by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

Mr. Rick Perkins: How long would the consultation that your company initiates take? It probably depends on the project.

Mr. Dale Austin: It's hard to put a hard number on it. We would engage in discussions and consultations as long as they were required to make sure that our partner communities, in particular, are comfortable with the project that we are putting forward.

• (1655)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Has the bill that my colleague Mr. Kram referred to earlier—known most publicly as Bill C-69—lengthened the process and increased the number of hurdles your company has to go through?

Mr. Dale Austin: We don't know yet. We have not attempted to put a project through the impact assessment process, so it is hard for us to comment. We are very carefully watching other companies that are making their way through the process to see if the timelines are met, but from Cameco's perspective, I can't say.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Because of all that, I'm still trying to grapple with the issue of whether or not this bill does anything that you're not already doing. If it does, it adds yet another layer of complexity to what companies in your situation in the Prairies are already doing. It seems to me to be a bureaucratization, perhaps, of something that any good and reasonable company needs to do these days to get any project going forward.

I don't see how adding another layer of a federal government-directed process on top of everything else you're doing does anything but slow down our ability to develop projects. At the end of the day, it may even deter capital from flowing to projects in western Canada because of that added bureaucracy.

Mr. Dale Austin: Perhaps I misinterpreted the bill. I saw this as a time-limited process to develop a framework for a green economy in the Prairies and that it would not add a significant amount of bureaucratic oversight, but I will take another look at the bill.

As I said earlier, any time the relevant players can get together to discuss a framework for developing a green economy, it's probably worthwhile to think about what the outcome is and whether or not the interested parties are looking to achieve similar objectives. I will take a closer look at the bill, but my understanding was that it's very time-limited. We'd develop a framework, and then from there, we would look at what that framework proposed and determine how it would fit into the process that we engage in when we're looking at new projects.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Subclauses 3(2) and 3(3) outline a very specific process and I do not see—although I could be wrong—that there are any time limits placed on it in the bill. If there aren't, presumably that's something you think should be added to the bill, perhaps at committee stage, if it's not there.

Mr. Dale Austin: I would think so. When I said that, I was looking at subclause 4(1), which reads, "Within 18 months after the day on which this Act comes into force, the Minister must prepare a report". That was the time limit that I was considering in terms of the time-limited nature of this.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Would you see this as an additional consultation process, or would it substitute what you're already doing?

Mr. Dale Austin: I would see this as an additional consultation process to what we're already doing.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Could that potentially add another 18 months to any project, then?

Mr. Dale Austin: No, not necessarily. I wouldn't see this as adding to any project timeline. We would be concurrently looking at projects while this bill or the framework was being developed, so I don't see this as cumulative. I would certainly see it as concurrent timing in terms of whatever it is we might be doing with a new project and being participants in the consultation and development of a framework.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Great. Thank you, Mr. Austin.

Mr. Chairman, those are all the questions I have.

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

We'll move to Mrs. Wagantall.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you very much, Chair.

I just have one follow-up question for Ms. Wowk.

You spoke about the percentage of greenhouse gases that are a result of ranching in Canada. Did you say that 2.4% was Canada's total impact on greenhouse gases globally?

Dr. Melanie Wowk: It's total Canadian greenhouse gas emissions.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: We're responsible for 2% to 3% of global greenhouse gas emissions, so are you saying it's 2% of that?

• (1700)

Dr. Melanie Wowk: Yes.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Okay, that's clarified it for me. That's appreciated.

When we talk about transportation in this bill, it talks more about small cities and communities. I know that, for Saskatchewan, we have no transportation systems for bussing people from point A to point B, which is what seems to be the focus of this, and it's not a realistic possibility at this time.

When you come to transporting livestock and dealing with all of the dynamics around your industry, what are the biggest challenges for you in regard to transportation?

Dr. Melanie Wowk: Right now the biggest issue is trying to find people to drive. There have been some changes in the transport regulations in regard to transporting livestock across the country. That's another thing that's not understood about our industry: that there is continual movement of cattle from one end of the country to the other, and from north to south with our American neighbours. Labour is our biggest issue right now, as I think it is with every other industry in this country. We just cannot find drivers.

We are currently going into our fall season, which is extremely busy for trucking. Our calves go to market, and then they are distributed to those people who will continue to feed them. It takes a lot of trucking, and we're up against not having enough. At the end, it can result in an animal welfare issue. We cannot have those cattle standing at auction markets for days; they need to be moving.

Labour is such a big issue for everybody, and nobody seems to have a good answer about how we're going to solve that.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Does labour for the ranching industry also include access to individuals who own the trucks to do the transportation, or is this more within your own...?

Dr. Melanie Wowk: No, this is a problem with the trucking companies. As Dennis said, there is a trucking company in Alberta right now sitting with 40 empty trucks because they cannot find anybody to drive them.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: All right. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

I see MP Dong. The floor is yours.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you very much, Chair.

I heard the question about transportation. I also had a question on that. I remember that, in 2018, Greyhound Canada announced cancellation of service in several regions in Canada, including the Prairies, but I also know that paragraph 3(3)(a) of Bill C-235 calls for “addressing the limited or non-existent transportation options in small cities and communities, and advancing innovative solutions for public transportation services in those cities and communities”.

I know that this may not be directly related to your industry or the group that you represent, but it is transportation for workers and for residents and it does matter quite a bit for the future development of these communities, as well as for predictability when it comes to municipalities, provinces and the federal government coming to the same table and laying out the plan for public transit.

I just want to hear from the witnesses about their thoughts on this particular paragraph. Do you think it will perhaps help to draw a blueprint for public transit options in the Prairies?

Dr. Melanie Wowk: I think the question for me that's difficult to answer is this: What do you consider large enough for public transport? Where we pick up our mail, there are two people who live there, and I drive an hour for groceries. That's where my question comes from.

I think there is a real misunderstanding. When they are talking about taxing these large trucks, trucks that are over half a tonne... For people in our situation, we need that for our way of life. We need that to get around. We need that for our trailers and things like that. That's where that question becomes difficult to answer. Is it a community of 10,000 that you're looking at to improve transportation? Is it within that community, or is it transporting people from, say, a town with 500 people who are going to another town 30 miles away that has 20,000 people, and that's where they go to work?

It's quite a complicated question. I just don't think that a lot of people realize how rural rural can be.

Mr. Han Dong: I completely appreciate your point of view. Perhaps where I was coming from was a replacement, or an improvement, of the Greyhound service that was taken away. There are individuals who struggle, and they may not have meaningful transportation. They rely on these public transportation options.

Thank you, Melanie, for your input.

Does anybody else want to comment on that?

• (1705)

Mr. Tyler Fulton: Just very briefly, I would echo everything that Melanie just said. It's important to address the labour shortage we have in rural areas, and a piece of that puzzle might be more accessible transportation. The reality is that it's a struggle to attract new Canadian workers and keep them in rural areas. Those transportation bottlenecks could be part of the picture.

The Chair: Mr. Austin, go ahead.

Mr. Dale Austin: Thank you.

I have a slightly different take on this question. Some of our partner communities where we operate are fly-in, fly-out communities. Public transit in that context is, in fact, a road to connect them to the south, to health services, groceries and all of those things. I

heard from my fellow witnesses today about the complexity of this question and public transportation. It means very different things depending on where you are and what your needs are. I just wanted to make that point.

Mr. Han Dong: That's a very good point.

Thank you, Chair. Those are all my questions.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dong.

Yes, I think we'll remember that: Some people don't realize how rural rural can be. I made a good note of it, coming from an urban riding.

[Translation]

Go ahead, Mr. Lemire.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I agree, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the beef industry representatives. Perhaps Mr. Fulton can answer, but anyone who wants to jump in should feel free to do so.

The Prairies are facing an increasing number of floods and droughts. My understanding is that desertification is an issue.

Can you talk about the beef industry's role in that situation?

Can your industry help on that front?

Are you worried?

[English]

Mr. Tyler Fulton: We really do see the cattle sector as providing that really important diversified landscape that provides resilience against flooding and droughts.

I'll give you an example of a drought scenario. Many crops that were not feasible for human consumption were redirected and used in the livestock sector, particularly in the cattle sector, which made the whole system more resilient. That only happens when you have that diversified landscape.

It's not just the aspects of, for example, slowing water that is flooding pastures, which can actually take up more moisture than tilled land can, but it's also providing more resilience to the rural economy by having that diversification.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I'm going to use Ms. Wowk's words here. In a “rural rural” area, one of the key issues facing the beef industry is access to slaughter facilities.

Are there places in Alberta or other parts of the Prairies where farmers do not have access to slaughter facilities within a 200- to 400-kilometre radius?

[English]

Dr. Melanie Wowk: Our consumers definitely are moving towards a farm-to-plate type of movement. A lot of people like to know where their beef comes from and where it is processed.

Right now, we definitely have a bottleneck in our processing capacity. There are two large plants that process 80% of Canada's beef, and those are in our province. There's a big backlog in terms of trying to get your farm beef done. Kids with 4-H calves are waiting up to a year to get into a small or medium-sized processor, and in our province you have to book up to a year or a year and a half ahead; it's very difficult to do because those cattle have to be ready when they're ready.

Our provincial government is currently working on an economic study in regard to the processing capacity of our province and determining what the best steps forward will be as to improving capacity and allowing people to perhaps have more of a local type of processing facility available to them. Yes, it's probably 200 to 300 miles.

• (1710)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: It's the same in my area, Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Cattle producers have to send their cattle up to 800 kilometres away for slaughter. That has a devastating impact.

What's more, none of the federal programs offer any support for the opening of a new provincial slaughterhouse in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue area. If we had one, it would allow for that farm-to-plate traceability consumers are looking for.

Do you think funding should be available to support the creation of new slaughterhouses so that every farmer has access to one within a reasonable distance?

Is that something the federal government could do to help?

That would be a huge economic boon for farmers.

[English]

Dr. Melanie Wowk: As far as funding for packing houses in the province goes, it depends on whether they're federally or provincially inspected. Most of the ones in the province are provincially inspected. They fall under provincial jurisdiction. I think that's where the issue comes in. It would be nice to have more federal plants, because that would increase our ability to sell to other provinces, to sell to other parts of the world. Boy, if we could see that, it would answer a lot of prayers for a lot of people, because it is becoming very difficult for us.

The only other thing I'm going to add is that it would be great to build them and it would be great to have them running, but can we find the people to work there? The two big plants are telling us right now that they do not have the worker capacity they need to run full tilt, and I know for sure that for the smaller guys—we have one in our area—it's very difficult to find labour.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I fully understand your concerns about the labour shortage, Ms. Wowk.

I have one last question, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Wowk, would cattle farmers be able to satisfy the demand those slaughterhouses would create?

If we built more slaughterhouses in “rural rural” areas, as you put it, would cattle and other livestock farmers be able to supply those facilities?

[English]

Dr. Melanie Wowk: We have had this conversation a lot in Alberta in regard to perking up our rural economy and bringing people back to rural Alberta and bringing small business back. A processing plant definitely is a small business that could bring a lot of people to rural Alberta, and that is definitely one thing that I believe could help us out.

It would help out the beef industry as well, but again, the question becomes what it falls under: Does it fall under provincial jurisdiction? I think most of them would, so the federal funding really isn't a question for us unless we're looking at building another federal plant.

I think Dennis has something to add.

Mr. Dennis Laycraft: Yes. I was going to add two comments.

The first is on distances. We can, very efficiently, move cattle long distances. We have an exceptionally positive ability to do that and get animals there in excellent condition. Canada is a huge country—the second-largest in the world. That's just part of what we need to do within the great spaces our industry occupies.

We export half of what we produce, so we need both. We need the large plants and that mixture of smaller plants. If we're trying to sell to a large retailer in another country.... If you're not one of the large plants, you can't produce enough beef to take care of their weekly requirements. As with all things, you need a mixture to create the most competitive system possible and deal with some of the regional challenges you referred to.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

Go ahead, Ms. Lapointe.

[English]

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Hello, Mr. Austin. I feel a need to tell you that my father worked in the uranium mines in Elliot Lake. That's where I was born. When I was two, we moved to Sudbury, where he worked in the nickel mines.

Earlier this week, this committee heard from Mr. Gil McGowan, who is the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour. That federation represents 28 affiliated unions and over 170,000 workers across Alberta. In a recent report, Mr. McGowan recommended that the province “skate to where the puck is going”. He said, “This is a once-in-a-century opportunity to establish new industries in Alberta.”

I would be interested to hear your thoughts on this approach to economic diversification and development.

Dr. Melanie Wowk: It would be. For me, it's about getting the people here and setting up an environment where people can be competitive in what they are doing. We have to be able to bring these people here and say to them, “You're going to be able to make a living doing this. This is going to be profitable for you. When you move into this community, there will be a doctor, a dentist, a hospital and a veterinarian.” We just can't do that yet. Being a veterinarian.... The shortage we have in Alberta right now.... There are almost 400 veterinarians needed in Alberta today, and that's not just for large animals. That's for companion animals, as well.

We've had the discussion with these communities, but the problem is that they want all of these other things, as well. The question becomes, where does the money come from to develop all of these things that people are asking for when they come to rural Alberta?

Ms. Viviane Lapointe: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Austin.

Mr. Dale Austin: Economic diversification is important, but, to extend your metaphor a bit, I would say that “skating to where the

puck is going” doesn't necessarily mean you need to put what you're doing on the bench. It can mean looking at the industries you currently have in a province, or a country, and examining ways to make them more innovative—looking at ways to reduce their carbon emissions, so they continue to produce in ways that are going to be beneficial in a new economy.

I think there's a combination where.... Yes, economic diversification is important, but we should not limit Canada's economic future simply to new industries. We have a long, successful history in many industries here, which, through innovative techniques and new technology, could continue to deliver economic benefits for many decades to come.

Ms. Viviane Lapointe: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I don't think there are any more questions.

Thank you to my fellow members.

My deepest thanks to the witnesses for being so flexible today and for sharing their recommendations. We certainly appreciate it.

I'd also like to thank the interpreters, the analysts, the clerk and all the support staff.

Have a great rest of the day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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