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# Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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Chair: Mr. Peter Schiefke





# Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Tuesday, December 3, 2024

• (1610)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 141 of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

We will begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the ancestral and unceded territories of the Algonquin and Anishinabe peoples. I want to express gratitude that we're able to do the important work of this committee on lands that they've stewarded since time immemorial.

Before we get into the meeting, I'd like to remind all in-person participants to read the best practices guidelines on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to protect the health and safety of all participants.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, November 21, 2024, the committee is commencing its study of environmental contamination in the vicinity of the dock of Fort Chipewyan.

All witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Colleagues, I'd now like to welcome our witnesses today.

From the Mikisew Cree First Nation, we have Tammie Tuccaro, councillor, and Lawrence Courtoreille, chief operating officer. Welcome to you both.

From the Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation, we have Kendrick Cardinal, president of the board of directors. Welcome to you, sir.

From the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, we have Chief Allan Adam. Welcome to you, sir.

Finally, as an individual, we have Mandy Olsgard, senior toxicologist, who is joining us by video conference. Welcome to you as well.

We'll begin with our opening remarks, for which everyone will have five minutes. For that, we will turn the floor over to Councillor Tammie Tuccaro.

The floor is yours.

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro (Councillor, Mikisew Cree First Nation):** Thank you, honourable Chair and distinguished members of the committee, for this opportunity to speak today.

*Tansi*, and good day. My name is Tammie Tuccaro, councillor for the Mikisew Cree First Nation, from Treaty No. 8 territory. I come here representing the voices of our community, many of whom have been impacted by an environmental disaster that wasn't made known for decades. Specifically, I want to address the contamination at the "big dock" in Fort Chipewyan, an issue that was left unchecked by the federal Crown and contributes to the environmental, health and mental health impacts that continue to affect our people, our children, our grandchildren and our way of life.

To start off, I'd like to read a quote from one of our land users:

Why was the community never notified, when all along the government knew about this contamination? This is the water we drink, swim and play in. This dock provides connection to my way of life for survival. Once again, the government failed our First Nation.

For years we were denied critical information about the contamination near the big dock from multiple sources, including a major diesel spill that occurred on Transport Canada property in the 1990s. This was a spill the federal Crown never reported to us nor cleaned up. The question that keeps on coming back up is this: Why did the federal Crown not consult with us on this matter?

Instead of notifying us of the spill and remediating this site, we were left in the dark, which unnecessarily exposed us and our children to a federally classified contaminated site, which we actively used. Our community has elevated rates of rare cancers. This situation undermines our efforts and responsibility to protect our people and evidences a complete disregard by the federal Crown of the health and safety of our community.

The 2017 report that is referred to, commissioned by Transport Canada, confirms the presence of nickel, arsenic and hydrocarbons in the groundwater, soil and sediment around the big dock, including on the big dock itself, and the levels that our people are exposed to exceed safety guidelines. The site is not only a commercial site, as mentioned in reports; it is used recreationally by our children and grandchildren for swimming, fishing and boat launching. They are all being directly exposed to cancer-causing toxins. As I said, we are exposed to many rare cancers in our community, a very small community.

On August 24, we sent a joint letter to the Minister of Transport that requested action to address the situation. This letter went unanswered for two months. This is unacceptable. Not getting answers has created a great deal of panic for our community and caused mental health impacts. The lack of responsiveness is a major setback in our path towards reconciliation as outlined in the TRC.

When we finally did receive a response, there was some promise of action, but it's clear that much more needs to be done. The federal Crown must address not just the environmental hazards but the mental health impacts the situation has caused. The fear, anger, anguish and frustration—all these things—that our community feels are evident, and those emotions are compounded by years of neglect over and over.

On November 1, Transport Canada shared with us eight additional studies on the site, but we have not been provided any type of funding capacity to review these documents. They are 300-page reports. We can't read those. This leaves us again in the dark. How can we make informed decisions about the health and safety of our community when we have been denied the opportunity to review this vital information?

To do our due diligence and as a precautionary measure, we notified members of our community not to swim or fish near the big dock until we have the peace of mind that this area is safe for use. Without context and because TC didn't accept our invitation to come to the community, the posting of these signs has been very alarming to our members. People have used this site regularly for recreational purposes for over 30-plus years, so we are continuously being exposed.

What upsets us even more about this case is that Transport Canada was in talks with our community to transfer ownership of the big dock to our respective nations knowing full well that this site was contaminated. They just wanted to hand this off to us to deal with. This move is seen as an attempt to transfer liability of the site, and it feels like the federal Crown was trying to wash their hands of their responsibilities and off-load the burden onto us.

I'm here today to demand that the work to correct this gets done and on our terms. We need funding for physical and mental health supports, and we need a full, independent, environmental and human health risk assessment completed by the specialists we select. This work is critical to understanding the full extent of the situation and to inform proper remediation efforts. Finally, we need a new dock in the next four months before spring comes and the start of the fire season.

- (1615)

Time is of the essence to address not just the environmental and health concerns, but also the mental health impacts that have resulted from this. This approach must acknowledge the environmental racism our community is continuously affronted with. The work will require dedicated resources, financing and streamlined regulatory processes. We expect all that will be provided to us.

We are not just asking for justice; we are demanding it. Our people have lived with this for far too long. It is time for the federal Crown to take responsibility, do the right things, right the wrongs

and ensure that this never happens again. We will not stay silent on this matter.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your opening remarks, Councillor Tuccaro.

Next I'll turn the floor over to President Cardinal.

The floor is yours, sir. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal (President, Board of Directors, Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation):** [*Witness spoke in indigenous language*]

[*English*]

Good day, honourable Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Kendrick Cardinal, and I'm the president of the Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation. I'm here today to share the heavy-hearted impacts the contamination of the big dock in Fort Chipewyan has had on our community environmentally, physically and emotionally. The federal government's failure to meaningfully consult with the community of Fort Chipewyan on this issue over the years has made it even worse. I want to take the opportunity to explain the scope of the harm we've experienced.

The big dock has always been an essential part of our lives in Fort Chipewyan. It's a vital place for us to launch our boats as we head onto the land during the open water season and practise our inherent rights, and it serves as our primary means of escape in emergencies like wildfires. We rely on the water in so many ways, and the thought that we cannot trust the safety of the dock or the surrounding environment is devastating to us.

This issue began with the diesel spill back in 1990 and the subsequent contaminated site designation in 2014 and associated site assessments.

In the letter received this morning from Transport Canada, I was informed that the Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation community was provided technical reports. However, my team has absolutely no proof of these reports. This is extremely concerning given the substantial input the Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation, along with other regional and indigenous communities, provided to Honourable Marc Garneau, the former minister of transport, in 2016 and 2017, during consultation on the creation of the Canadian Navigable Waters Act. In particular, we stated that when the protection of most waters used by rights holders for navigation to carry out their constitutionally protected rights is excluded, it's not only discriminatory, in our view, but contrary to the constitutional requirements of reconciliation.

We requested further engagement with the Ministry of Transport to further discuss our concerns, including those related to having our navigation on and relationship with waterways recognized, respected and protected. That engagement did not occur, and it is clear from recent events that a better, more meaningful relationship and consultation are needed.

In 2023, we learned just how unprepared we were. During the height of a major wildfire in Fort Chipewyan that threatened our community, many of our members were devastated and turned to the big dock as a way to evacuate. Some chose to leave by water, if they were able to pull their boats through the mud and into the water, and headed through their traplines, where they felt they would be safe. However, the water levels were so low that the dock could not be used effectively. This was a dangerous situation, and it could have been avoided had the dock been properly maintained and had the reports come back from the federal government to our community.

This year, our neighbouring nation, the ACFN, reached out to Transport Canada to ask for support, requesting that the dock be dredged so that our community could evacuate safely in the future, yet despite all our requests, no action was taken. This only added to our growing frustration and concern. If the waters become too low, our traditional harvesting areas will be in danger, and the Fort Chipewyan Métis have been found to have the highest wild food diets.

Beyond environmental risk, the biggest toll has been on our mental and physical health. For years, we've lived with the uncertainty of not knowing the full extent of contamination and what it means for our health. Our community already has a higher-than-average rate of rare cancers, and the presence of toxic substances in our environment only adds to that fear. Last year, the situation got even worse. The largest seepage in history from the oil sands added more stress and uncertainty to an already difficult situation.

● (1620)

It's difficult to put into words the kind of stress that comes from living in this constant fear. We are constantly asking ourselves questions. Is it safe to fish here? Is it safe to swim here? Can we drink the water? We should never have to live with this level of uncertainty.

The contamination at the big dock was kept from us for decades. When we finally learned about it, we felt betrayed. We had no idea that such a serious issue was sitting right in the heart of our community.

One issue I want to emphasize today is the trauma that has been caused by all of this, the emotional and mental toll it has taken on our people, mostly our youths and elders. The stress of living in this uncertainty is compounded by the fear that our health and the health of the children are at risk.

We need support to help cope with these mental health challenges. This is not just an environmental crisis. It is a public health crisis as well, and it is one that requires mental health support from an indigenous perspective to address the trauma and fear we've been carrying for so long.

In closing, since Minister Anand took over the transport ministry, she has reached out to our communities, and we appreciate that. We recognize her willingness to work with us. Our hope is that this collaboration continues in a way that leads to real, tangible results, but we are asking for more than just communication. We need action. Our community deserves to live in safety, and it is the government's responsibility to ensure that happens.

The contamination at the big dock cannot be ignored any longer. It's time for the government to take full responsibility, remediate the site and ensure we are protected from further harm.

Fort Chipewyan has been heavily impacted by the Holy Angels residential school, and this is another clear indication of how the federal government has not followed through on reconciliation. The voices of the community of Fort Chipewyan need your immediate attention, please and thank you.

*Hai hai. Kinanâskomitin.* Have a good day.

● (1625)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, President Cardinal, for your opening remarks.

I'll now turn the floor over to Chief Adam.

Chief Adam, the floor is yours, sir.

**Chief Allan Adam (Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As a land acknowledgement for the Algonquin, Ojibwa, Mohawk and Cree, we come to your territory.

My name is Chief Allan Adam, and I'm from the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. I want to say thank you to Tammie, Lawrence and President Cardinal for coming with us to make our submission here today.

One thing we look at in our community and talk about is climate change as an issue, not knowing that it would turn into a man-made disaster when you look at it from a holistic approach. This is in relation to the community's safe evacuation from a fire that happened in 2022.

We entered a similar situation in 2023, when not only were we up against fires around the community, but there was a low-water drought, which caused significant damage to the community's boat access. We were trying to fix the problem by asking Transport Canada if it could dredge so we could have safe passage if we needed to evacuate for an emergency situation. Transport Canada came back and said that, no, they could not do anything. We went on and said that we needed to get this done and that we were going to do it without Transport Canada's advice.

We learned that if we were to use any kind of machinery to dredge the water out whatsoever, I, as the chief of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, would be put in jail. That is the only solution that Transport Canada sent us—a letter stating that I would be incarcerated and that charges would be laid against me. We have the email that was sent to us.

This is coming from the bureaucratic system. This is when we said we were going to make changes and then go through the system. When we went through the system, we hired a contractor, and the contractor found contaminants based on the research done through Transport Canada, dating back all the way to 1997. How many governments have been in power since 1997? Don't look at the fact that the current government—the Trudeau government—is under the Liberal banner. Both the Conservatives and Liberals have had power since then, based on my recollection.

I'm not here to point fingers at anybody and say that you've done something wrong. I'm here to tell you to come fix the problem that has arisen in our community. Maybe the community wouldn't speak about the cancer issues that are causing people to die constantly in our community from the environmental effects. I've always said that one day our community will be environmental refugees. Thanks to Canada and Transport Canada—alongside your baby sister, the Government of Alberta—we are heading down the path toward being environmental refugees. We cannot drink contaminated water.

Every year, we used to see community members go down to the beach and celebrate with the kids on Canada Day. They celebrated what Canada had to offer us, not knowing the disaster that was laid out before us. We watched our kids and adults all swimming there, having fun. Next year, in 2025, knowing that this is all out in the open, you're not going to see one kid in the water, but this has been going on.

We can't continue to go down this path when you say that we are one of the G7 countries of the world. The water contamination in the community of Fort Chip is at a third world level when it comes to contaminants. It's done by industrial movement components upstream from us.

● (1630)

The spills that happened in the eighties, nineties and recently—at the Imperial site—are starting to accumulate. Nothing will be left unturned. These things have to be fixed. If not, we will continue to embarrass you all. You are the ruling government of this country named Canada. Whether you are Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Green or Bloc, you're all part of the whole situation. Nobody is covered under the Crown. This is your mess. You need to clean it up.

I can't stand there and tell our young kids not to go swimming anymore in our beautiful lake. For years, I swam in the lake down by the big dock, down by the forestry dock. I played on the beaches as a kid. In 1997, I was probably 31 years old. I still swam in those areas with my kids. When is this going to become a major issue for the country of Canada to address? Our community has been speaking about environmental issues and health concerns since 1992. Our people are contracting rare diseases—rare cancers. Autoimmune disease is high in the community. Skin rashes are high and unaccounted for. We can't even find the right medication for the skin rashes kids develop today. What's that from? Is it from contaminated water, which continues to be in the public eye? We need to address this issue and we need to address it immediately—no more pointing fingers at anybody whatsoever.

If it's going to cost \$25 million to remediate the big dock, fix it up. Then we will take ownership of the big dock, as Transport Canada wants us to. They've been lobbying me since 2013. In 2013, it was the Harper government in power. They asked us to take over the liability of the big dock knowing full well about all the contamination there. I am glad that we as a community decided not to take ownership of it, because look at the mess we would have taken on. We would have signed off on Canada relinquishing its part—all of your fiduciary duties and responsibilities—to the community of Fort Chip. You are the elected members of Parliament who are supposed to correct wrongdoing on environmental issues.

Do not be mistaken. The Peace River and the Athabasca River, along with Lake Athabasca itself, are listed as among the seven major rivers running through Canada. The Athabasca River runs through Fort Chip and continues down to the Peace River. Just because it's a lake doesn't mean it's not part of a river. The current still goes right through our community. We take our water from it and everything.

We have a lot of concerns in the community. Our people are stressed out. I got phone calls from people this past summer asking me, “Chief, is it safe to go swimming?” Do you know what I told them for the first time? “Don't go swimming in that lake. Stay away from there until we fix it up.” Now I'm asking you to fix it up. Do not let this embarrassment continue. How you guys treat first nations communities up north is a black eye for Canada. Even now, the biggest industrial movement is happening 200 kilometres upstream from us. We're affected downstream by everything that comes there.

We're not saying we're not part of the cause of the problem. We're saying we're going to help fix the problem once and for all, but we need your assistance. If not, we will do it ourselves. If Transport Canada wants to put me in jail, by all means it can go ahead and do so.

● (1635)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your opening remarks, Chief Adam.

I'll now turn the floor over to Ms. Olsgard.

Ms. Olsgard, the floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Ms. Mandy Olsgard (Senior Toxicologist, As an Individual):** Good afternoon and thank you, Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to provide testimony as it relates to the federal contaminated site in Fort Chipewyan. I'm testifying today from the traditional and ancestral lands of first nations and Métis people now referred to as Treaty 6.

As a toxicologist and professional biologist practising in Alberta, I provide technical expertise on health risks and toxicity-related issues to each of the three nations testifying here today. Prior to this, I was a senior toxicologist at the Alberta Energy Regulator, but I began my career as a consultant focusing on environmental site and health risk assessments at contaminated sites.

When ACFN became aware of the designation of the Transport Canada wharf commonly referred to as the big dock, as it was a federal contaminated site, they requested technical support in understanding what exactly that meant and if there could be health risks to community members from the traditional activities shared by ACFN, Fort Chip Métis and MCFN, who are here today. To support this request, I focused my review on the 2017 human health preliminary quantitative risk assessment and ecological risk assessment, which I'll refer to as the risk assessment, by Millennium EMS Solutions, which relied on the phase 3 environmental site assessment conducted by EGE Engineering Services. These studies referenced the previous studies since 1997, but those were not available to me and I have not reviewed them.

Briefly, there were six different areas of potential concern with identified contamination of soil, sediment and groundwater at the big dock. This is not uncommon at docks across Canada, but what is uncommon is that there was a lack of notification in 2014 when the TC wharf was classified as a class 2 contaminated site under the national classification system for contaminated sites. This designation suggests that action is likely required, because those sites have a high potential for adverse off-site impacts. The lack of notification by Transport Canada to the three nations appears to be a failure of successive federal governments as to step 3 of the federal contaminated sites action plan, which directs notification and engagement of nearby stakeholders.

The sources of contamination were due to activities such as fuelling barges, fuel storage, construction materials and spills over the years. Contamination was identified and not fully delineated, a deficiency of the 2017 phase 3 ESA, for several classes of chemicals, including metals, volatile organic hydrocarbons, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and petroleum hydrocarbons. From a toxicological perspective, several health effects can be experienced from exposure to these chemicals, including but not limited to cancers of the digestive tract and blood and lymphatic systems, non-carcinogenic effects on the neurological system and kidneys, and skin rashes.

In the interest of time, I would like to first speak to why I could not answer the question posed to me by the three nations. The main technical inaccuracy identified in my review of the risk assessment conducted by the third party consultants, which would have limited its usefulness in managing health risks and determining remedial objectives—the stated intent—is that the consultant incorrectly classified the site as commercial use, effectively limiting the assessment of human exposure. That is inaccurate given the reliance of community members on the big dock for their traditional way of life.

From table D in the speaking notes provided, it is evident that the majority of human health exposure pathways were determined by the consultant to be inoperable, and, as such, they were excluded from the risk assessment. This means the risk assessment did not assess or provide results for potential risks from the ingestion of traditional foods and medicines. This is in a northern community with a 91% indigenous population and well-documented reliance on the land and water for traditional diets. It did not assess the potential risks from contact with contaminated soils or contact with contaminated sediments or the surface water. This finding is incon-

sistent with recent communications from the Minister of Transport's office and a letter received by ACFN, which states that the studies previously undertaken at the site have not identified any risks to human health or the environment, and the department has no indication that these circumstances have changed.

As I have shown here, human health exposure pathways specific to the three nations in Fort Chipewyan were not assessed, and the full extent of potential risks to community members from exposure to contamination at the TC wharf through ingestion of foods and medicines and exposure to contaminated media is unknown. Notably—and this is not reflected in recent Transport Canada communications—the risk assessment did predict potential risks to human health if groundwater was consumed. This is important, as the risk assessment predicted that exposure to benzene, 2-methylnaphthalene and PHC F2 concentrations in groundwater could pose potential risks if people were consuming it. The risk assessment recommended follow-up studies to document the use of domestic water wells that were identified in the area. There's no evidence that these were followed through on by the government.

• (1640)

This is more concerning and is evidence of poor professional practice by the consultant when the potential effect of benzene exposure to cause cancers of the blood and bone systems are considered along with the most recent reporting of cancer incidents by the Alberta government in the community of Fort Chipewyan. This notably has not been updated for over a decade.

As shown in figure 2 in the speaking notes, the consultant did not establish the baseline community health condition or consider the higher-than-expected cancer rates in Fort Chipewyan, which have been documented and reported by the Alberta government since 2009. There are a higher number of observed cases of biliary tract cancers, cancers of the blood and lymphatic system, lung cancer, and all types of cancers, as reconfirmed in 2014.

Am I out of time?

**The Chair:** You are, Ms. Olsgard. I didn't want to cut you off, because you were sharing important information.

**Ms. Mandy Olsgard:** I have just one more paragraph.

**The Chair:** By all means, go ahead and finish. I think we should get your opening remarks on record.

**Ms. Mandy Olsgard:** Another important finding was that surface water samples were not collected in the phase 3 ESA or relied on in the risk assessment. This should have stopped a risk assessment from being conducted. No data for chemicals and surface water was considered.

Supplemental monitoring data collected by ACFN and MCFN in 2024 through their community-based monitoring programs provided surface water and sediment quality data that confirmed metal and PAH contamination persists today. Unfortunately, due to the deficiencies and errors of the health risk assessment contracted by the federal government, the source of contamination in surface water and sediments at the TC wharf has not been fully identified or delineated. Contaminated soils, groundwater and sediment have not been remediated. The potential risks to community members' health are still unknown.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your opening remarks, Ms. Olsgard.

We will begin our line of questioning today with Mrs. Goodridge.

Mrs. Goodridge, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to start off by thanking our witnesses for being here. It's always lovely to see some more faces from northern Alberta in Ottawa.

I'm going to jump right into this.

President Cardinal, you said in your statement that you denied receiving the letter that Minister Anand said that your organization, Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation, supposedly received. Are you saying she's not telling the truth?

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** What letter in particular—the one from this morning?

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Yes.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** We received that one. I was referring to the 20 reports from 2014 to 2017. We haven't received any substantial documents that prove the communications from the federal ministers on transport.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** As far as you're concerned or aware, you didn't receive any notification of this contamination.

• (1645)

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** None whatsoever. If there are any supporting documents, I'd like those sent to the three nations in the community of Fort Chipewyan...that the communication was proceeded with.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Councillor Tuccaro, has Mikisew been able to do an assessment similar to what Fort Chip Métis did?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** We've been trying. Seeing that we only received this letter at basically the eleventh hour, we've been trying to utilize our resources to do background checks. In what we've been able to do in the last couple of hours, it's not evident that we received anything whatsoever.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** I hate to assume things, but if communication was shared with Mikisew stating that there was contamination, I assume this wouldn't just somehow go in a desk drawer.

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** It's something we wouldn't take lightly, that's for sure. The letter points out that it was only shared with the Métis and the Mikisew Cree. We definitely would have shared that information with ACFN and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo considering that the RMWB is where the TC wharf is. The letter is unclear for us and is creating confusion between all of us. That's what we want to get to the bottom of also. As President Cardinal says, we would like to see these letters so we can go back and see where things were missed or what happened.

During that same time frame, our nations were in the midst of working on the agricultural “cows and plows” benefits. We were heavily focused on that. To see something that's classified as contamination raises red flags. It's something that definitely would have been dealt with right then and there. It's not something we would have let go this long.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** I appreciate that.

I remarked that the wharf is on the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo land, and they weren't consulted. They aren't even mentioned in the letter.

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** They're not mentioned in the letter, but they are cc'd. That is also something we questioned.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** How did you receive this letter from Minister Anand?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** This morning it was forwarded to us from the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. It wasn't even sent directly to the Mikisew Cree First Nation.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** President Cardinal, how did you receive this letter?

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** It was forwarded to us. Prior to me becoming a political leader, I had an old email address. It was sent there, so no time was really taken to do the homework to find out who I was.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

Chief Adam, in your statement you commented that for quite a while, you guys had been asking Transport Canada to dredge. You finally decided enough was enough; you were going to dredge the water yourselves because you could see the emergency when it came to low water levels and the threat of fire. Their answer to you was that they could charge you. At that point, did they tell you why?

**Chief Allan Adam:** No, they didn't tell me why they would charge me, other than that we were messing up and moving contaminants through the sediment.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Even at that point, they didn't let you know that there were any concerns around contamination.

**Chief Allan Adam:** Nothing at all—they didn't say anything. They just said that if we put any machinery in there, we would likely be incarcerated.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Is that what reconciliation looks like to you?



**Chief Allan Adam:** I don't talk about reconciliation with Canada because I think Canada itself continues to lie to first nations people. I won't bring up reconciliation until Canada stands up and says what they're going to do under the 94 calls to action that the late Murray Sinclair put into position. Reconciliation doesn't exist on Canada's part because they don't believe in it.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Did they give you any kind of answer when you were bringing up concerns about emergency preparedness and being able to evacuate people under the threat of fire? Did they tell you what their plan was if the dock wasn't accessible and you couldn't fly planes in?

**Chief Allan Adam:** No, nothing. They just basically said the community would be on its own because of the situation, and that if we had to evacuate, we would follow the same procedure done in 2022, when they had multiple aircraft coming to the community. However, many people in the community don't like flying whatsoever, and they use the transport of outboard motors from the big dock in the community. It was evident that this was well used when the fire threatened to burn our community in 2022.

We thought, because of 2023, that it was going to reoccur. We asked Transport Canada to fix the dock up and dredge it, and that's when this whole thing came into play.

• (1650)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Chief Adam.

Next we'll go to Ms. Koutrakis.

Ms. Koutrakis, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all our witnesses today.

I am terribly sorry for what we're finding out and how it has impacted your communities. My hope is that through this study, we will together come up with the recommendations that are needed so badly to make sure we do better going forward.

I would ask President Cardinal, Chief Adams and Councillor Tuccaro to each chime in on this. How would you like the government to work with your community as they work to resolve this issue?

**Chief Allan Adam:** That is a good question.

The first thing we would like to get done relates to the funding situation. Both first nations and the Métis have spent a lot funding in this area out of pocket. That has to be refunded to the respective communities, because we are doing the deed for Canada and we should never be doing it. Why are we out of pocket? Why am I spending so much money on consultants and my team in order to move forward? It is the same with the Mikisew Cree First Nation. It's the same with the Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation. We're spending money out of pocket, and we should be reimbursed immediately.

Then follow the plan of remediation, and maybe change the landscape of the big dock so we can fix it up to be usable again. Only once that's all done, because Transport Canada wants to hand the dock over to the community, will we accept the big dock. Transport Canada cannot decommission the big dock. They've been threaten-

ing to decommission it if the first nations don't want to take the big dock into their responsibility. If you decommission the big dock, our community will continue to be at the mercy of climate change. We're asking for an all-weather road, if that's the case. That's another issue that Transport Canada should talk about because of safe transportation when it comes to an emergency or crisis.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Chief Adam, you say that Transport Canada refuses. Is this a refusal that happened recently, or are we talking about a refusal that happened in the past?

**Chief Allan Adam:** Transport Canada refused to do anything just recently, as of 2024, when we requested that the big dock be dredged out because of an emergency fire situation. They said, no, it cannot be done. Then we went there and said we were going to do the dredging ourselves. We were notified that if we did, I would be incarcerated as the leader of the nation.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Go ahead, President Cardinal.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** I just wanted to add that we speak the truth and we would just like the dock to be fixed.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Ms. Tuccaro, did you want to add something?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** As Chief Allan was saying, for the remediation aspect of things, we would like to be the ones in control and handling this, not TC. We don't know what other analysis and things like that are involved. If we did an independent study and remediation, I think we would feel better as a community being in charge of those things.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you.

Ms. Olsgard, in your testimony, you mentioned some pretty alarming issues vis-à-vis how the assessment was done at the time. I'm sure my colleagues on the committee will agree with me.

Can you explain to us what was done and how it should have been done? In your opinion, how could we have done better, through either Transport Canada, which hired this assessment, or the government?

I'm just trying to better understand that, because it appears that there are a lot of gaps in the assessment. In your expert and professional opinion, how should these assessments have been done versus how they were done?

**Ms. Mandy Olsgard:** First of all, engage the people who live in the area. They know how they use the dock and what the exposure pathways are. That is what I referred to. If the consultants or the government had notified the community and engaged it, the risk assessment would have looked fundamentally different.

Health Canada publishes the guidance for how we do health risk assessments in Canada. That guidance specifically states that you have to engage indigenous communities because their land use is different from that of the general Canadian public. They have different ways of life that could expose them to higher concentrations of contamination. It recognizes that they often live in different and lower socio-economic conditions than the general public of Canada and have a different health status. All of that is in the guidance. There's also a supplemental guidance for human health risk assessment for country foods, which is what we call traditional foods and medicine. The guidance was all there.

In the oil sands area in northern Alberta and a bit across Canada—but in Alberta specifically—there are a lot of consultancies with risk assessors who practise with and work for developments and proponents. We don't have a governing body for risk practitioners. We all practise under different professional organizations. I'm a professional biologist. There's APEGA, which would be for engineers. You don't go to school to become a risk assessor. It's based on who you trained under and how you learned.

If you have a system that is, as I'll refer to it, risking away liability to try to save money so you don't have to clean up contamination and this becomes the industry best practice or standard, that's how we get risk assessments like this. Designating a community use area with a lot of human contact as a commercial site wouldn't have happened if you had talked to anyone in this room or engaged anyone. It would have looked fundamentally different.

I'm not saying a different consultant needed to do it, but if direction had been provided and people had been engaged, the consultant wouldn't have been able to go out on their own. I don't have any indication of what Transport Canada guidance was given to the consultant, but again, it's shocking to me that a federal department wouldn't have understood the use of big dock in Fort Chipewyan.

• (1655)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Koutrakis.

Thank you, Ms. Olsgard.

[*Translation*]

Next on the list is Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Before I turn the floor over to him, I would like to point out something.

[*English*]

I just wanted to inform all of our witnesses that Mr. Barsalou-Duval will be speaking in French. If you are unable to understand French, we have simultaneous interpretation, so I would invite you to use the earpieces. Within 10 to 15 seconds, if you haven't received simultaneous interpretation, please advise me and I'll ensure it's working for you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the witnesses.

Your being here in Ottawa today is essential so that we can hear in person what you've experienced. It must have been not only frustrating, but also extremely worrisome. If I had swum in contaminated water or my children had, I would certainly react the same way.

Someone said that Transport Canada did not notify your nations that the site was contaminated, but was the municipality of Wood Buffalo notified?

[*English*]

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** I don't know if anybody knows this, but I'm also a city councillor for Fort McMurray and the regional municipality. To my recollection, from questions pertaining to this, we were not notified. I can confirm that.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** I ask because it makes sense for the municipal authority to be made aware.

You mentioned that discussions were under way to transfer ownership of the wharf. Who would take over the wharf? Would it be one of your nations or the municipality?

Also, did the department commit to cleaning up the wharf before turning it over, or would it be transferred as is?

[*English*]

**Chief Allan Adam:** In 2013, when I visited Ottawa on numerous occasions, the big dock came up at our table. At the time, Transport Canada wanted to give it to community members—both the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and the Mikisew Cree First Nation.

We were down here on other matters, and it was brought to our attention that Transport Canada wanted to do away with the big dock. They wanted to get it off their books, but to do so, they asked the first nations if they wanted to take on the responsibility and liability of the big dock. They were going to give us \$25 million to fix up the dock so we could use it and make sure that everything was going well, and from there on in, it would be up to the community to fix the dock. By choice, we said, "No, that's Transport Canada's position." That's why Transport Canada still has it today. We're telling them that they're not going to get rid of that dock as long as emergency situations arise from it. It's our way out of the community.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you.

I assume your concerns and frustration have to do with the wharf situation we're talking about today, but I assume you're also extremely concerned over the seepage of millions of litres of contaminated water from the oil sands.

Does your community feel as though it's being hit from all sides? How much of a threat is the wharf situation versus the water contamination from the oil sands?

[English]

**Chief Allan Adam:** If you did not hear my colleague Tammie speak about the issue if nothing is done.... The community uses it. The community uses the big dock every day eight months out of the year when there is water. No matter what, even on a windy day when you can't put a boat on the dock itself, people will go down to the dock to look at the big lake. Kids would constantly swim at big dock.

When your Minister of Environment and colleague Mr. Guilbeault came to Fort Chip back in August, there were kids swimming in the water, and I had to tell them to stay out of the water because it's contaminated. Why am I doing the deeds of Transport Canada?

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** I want to add that the effects of upstream activity and the contamination down at our big dock prove Chief Adams's statements from previous comments. They show the surrounding contaminants and the environmental racism happening in our community and how much communication and collaboration are being done to nullify the destruction of our homelands.

It's not only that, though; it's taking away our cultural heritage. The impacts that the oil sands and the contamination at the dock have administered to our community have taken away the cultural aspect of going fishing. Fishing was a very big piece of our community in Fort Chipewyan. It was the heart of the Peace-Athabasca delta. The pioneers were there. This has really impacted our community. Not only is it another addition to the impacts that our community is struggling with, but it just goes to show what's really heavy in our hearts.

[Translation]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** I gather that daily life for—

**The Chair:** Mr. Barsalou-Duval, unfortunately, you're out of time.

Thank you.

[English]

Next we'll turn the floor over to Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

This must be an infuriating situation, and after listening to your opening statements, I can only imagine what it would be like to know that this contamination exists, that your communities are exposed to it on a daily basis and that the government has known about it for a long time and didn't tell you. I know that conversations about the divestment of the dock have been going on since 2013, but this issue really hit the news at the beginning of October, I believe, to the point where Minister Anand, early in her new mandate as Minister of Transport, flew to the community to discuss it. I'm sorry; I got that wrong. She hasn't been to the community. The previous minister had been to the community.

• (1705)

**Chief Allan Adam:** No, no ministers of transport went.

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** We had a phone call.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Okay, that's my mistake. There was a telephone call. There was a meeting with the minister. Obviously, the government is all of a sudden taking this issue seriously, because it represents a risk to them.

Now, today, hours before this hearing, you received a letter from the minister's office essentially saying that they sent you the information a long time ago and that the information, the reports, show there isn't a risk to human health in your community.

How did it feel to receive that letter? What do you make of the timing, given that this letter was sent to you hours before this hearing today in Parliament?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** It felt like a kick in the gut, for sure. It just feels like they're creating confusion among us and trying to divert away from themselves and create chaos between the three of us nations. We come here together because this is about our community. That's the main thing. It's about our community of Fort Chipewyan, and the three of us together are stronger than just one.

If they're going to create this gap, or whatever you want to call it, between the three of us, it's not going to work. We're here and we're fighting our case, and we hope that you guys can hear and understand, as you said, our communities and our frustrations.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Chief Adam, it's notable that your nation was excluded from the list of nations that were apparently notified. What do you make of that?

**Chief Allan Adam:** Maybe we're excluded from everything because nobody wants to hear us. The fact remains that information is being shared with both the Métis and the Mikisew Cree First Nation. It was all given to them, but it wasn't given to us. The information that was given out this morning, which shared information our community knows about, was given to us but not to them. There is a big communication misunderstanding, and it is done by Transport Canada.

We have to look at the facts. At the time, former minister Pablo Rodriguez refused to address this issue. Since then, he has stepped down as minister of transport and sits as an independent, but this issue is not going away, no matter where former minister Pablo Rodriguez goes. Our issue with the big dock is that it is going to remain contaminated. Our kids will continue to go swimming there if nobody is watching them. We can't man the big dock. We can't put a lifeguard down there who can say, "I'm sorry. You can't go into the water." If that's the case, is Transport Canada going to pay for the lifeguard?

Let's be honest about it. These are the issues that are happening. We're trying to keep our kids away from the contaminated water because of the sediments. We need that cleaned up.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Since 2013, there have been, I understand, dozens of emails about the potential divestment of the dock. There have been in-person meetings where government officials have come to the community to talk to you about the idea of selling you the dock, or transferring the dock.

In any of these meetings and communications, was there any mention whatsoever of the fact that it is contaminated?

**Chief Allan Adam:** No, not from my recollection, and I probably sit here with the longest standing among us. Ever since I've been involved with the committee on the big dock issue, not once has it ever been mentioned to me or anybody sitting there that there is contamination in the big dock area.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** I want to add that we were pretty happy to be told that the dock could be ours. This was before we found out about the contaminants. We were pleased that Transport Canada said we could take over the dock, but we didn't know about the contamination because we'd been neglected for so long on the big dock. We just wanted to have it fixed so we could have proper boat-launching and safety means.

• (1710)

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Mr. Chair, are you going to give me 20 more seconds?

**The Chair:** I'll give you 20 more seconds, Mr. Bachrach, yes.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Looking back on the process, did you get a feeling that the federal government would have been willing to transfer the dock to you without ever disclosing or discussing the contamination in a meaningful way?

**Chief Allan Adam:** I think the possibility is real. A threat was evident. They wanted to transfer everything over to us, including the liability, but there was no mention of that ever.

It was only for safety reasons, for evacuation, because our community doesn't have an all-weather road leading out of it. That's how all of this came to be. It was because there's no all-weather road. We need safe access out of the community of Fort Chip if all hell breaks loose.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Thank you, Chief Adam.

I want to thank colleagues for allowing me to be a little lenient with the time today. I'm planning to do so for the rest of the meeting and for the meeting on Thursday, if it's all right with all committee members.

I will now turn the floor over to Mrs. Goodridge.

Mrs. Goodridge, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Thank you.

One thing that I think is important to get on the record here is why this is such a critical piece of infrastructure. I'm sure there are people watching at home going, "Why is there a dock that DFO and Transport Canada own in northern Alberta, a landlocked province?" As you stated, there is no all-weather road to get up there.

Councillor Tuccaro, how do you get to Fort Chipewyan in the summertime?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** The main means of transportation to our community in the summertime are air and boat, depending on the water levels.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** What kind of airplane?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** Our airplane is a nine-seater Caravan—that's if you can get a flight, because the flights are always so

booked up. You have to have at least a couple of weeks' notice to book a flight. You can't just book a flight and be out the same day.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** What about in the wintertime?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** In the wintertime, we have roughly about three months—depending on the weather and the climate—to travel over the rivers and the lake and onto an ice road.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Thank you. I appreciate that, because I think it speaks to how important having a dock is in what's effectively a maritime community in a landlocked province, which is pretty cool and very unique.

Considering how limited your access out is, has anyone from the Government of Canada given you guys any idea of how they would evacuate you in the event that the airport wasn't accessible in the summertime?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** Not that I'm aware of.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Chief Adam.

**Chief Allan Adam:** No. Nobody from Transport Canada has made us aware of how we would deal with that issue if it were to ever arise again.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** This summer, the airport was threatened. There was a very serious threat that the airport was no longer going to be accessible. Even at that point, did anyone from the Government of Canada give you guys some kind of an answer?

**Chief Allan Adam:** We received an answer from Indigenous Services Canada, ISC, and they said they would send a helicopter to pick us up.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** A helicopter can take, I don't know, three passengers—

**Chief Allan Adam:** Five.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:**—so it's something like 300 flights to get 1,000 people out.

**Chief Allan Adam:** That was their response to us in that regard.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** That seems reasonable.

Is it safe to say that there is no trust from the community in Transport Canada?

**Chief Allan Adam:** There is no trust at all on our part whatsoever based on what's out there, yes.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** I am so frustrated. I've heard from so many people in the community of Fort Chip who have reached out to share their frustration over the cover-up. They feel like the government lied to them by not giving them that information. They would have had their children swim in a different part of the lake.

Can you describe some of what you hear in the community from parents who have allowed their kids to swim in that lake? I see, Councillor Tuccaro, you're nodding along.

• (1715)

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** There is a lot of concern from everybody, even from people who don't use the lake. As you said, we only use part of the lake. That's the only place where we have a beach and a family park to be utilized, and they have been used for, as I said previously, over 30 to 40 years. That is the spot adjacent to the wharf, so that's where—

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** It looks like a beach. I've been there.

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** It does, yes. You swim. That's where you swim and fish from.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Has Transport Canada put up any signs stating not to swim there? I've seen some signs, but has Transport Canada—

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** There's no signage from Transport Canada. That was done by us to alert our community members that the water is contaminated.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Even after communicating with you guys, they didn't take it upon themselves to put up any kind of signage alerting people that it was a dangerous place.

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** No, none whatsoever.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Ms. Olsgard, you talked about how the risk assessment was wrong because it didn't take into account how this dock is used in this community. Could you describe in a bit more detail how the risk assessment should have happened had Transport Canada been doing their job?

**Ms. Mandy Olsgard:** As I said, similar to every EIA risk assessment I've reviewed in the oil sands region in the past 15 years, pathways were excluded based on the consultant's discretion of how the land was used.

The consultant looked at Health Canada guidance and worked through the guidance. It was really difficult for this region, knowing that it was Millennium EMS Solutions, which supports oil sands risk assessments. It does a lot of work in Alberta. The consultant would have had to almost actively ignore that indigenous people live in Fort Chipewyan to designate it commercial and exclude those pathways. I can't put it any other way.

In my professional opinion, I would expect the Alberta Society of Professional Biologists, if something like this came up, to look into how I conducted this study. I think APEGA would do the same.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mrs. Goodridge.

Next we'll go to Mr. Badawey.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

**Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First off, I want to say thank you to you folks for coming out today.

I hear you. You've been going through this for almost three decades and through many governments with their full knowledge.

All governments had knowledge and unfortunately didn't act as they should have for those three decades.

I was a mayor of a community for 14 years that had a similar problem. You might have heard about the Inco contamination in Niagara that plagued our community. When I was asked as a young mayor at the time what I was going to do about it, my response was that we were going to focus and get it done. Simply put, as I did as a mayor then, as an MP I would suggest we do the same—that we focus, get to work and deal with it, period.

The process we used back then was beyond a site-specific risk assessment or an EA. An EA is basically a history lesson, so we got a bit more granular and did a site-specific risk assessment, but it was such a big plume area and there was so little knowledge in the science of the recognized CFCs that we did a community-based risk assessment. This might be the case in your community, because it takes everything into consideration. It takes human health into consideration. It takes phytotoxicology into consideration. It takes into consideration everything from plants to water to every possible element that might be affected by the CFCs that are recognized. Then it establishes a science on the recognized contaminants of concern, and beyond that, based on the land-use planning within a community and what's going to go where, it addresses the PPM level, the parts per million level, that would be established through science. Of course, following that would be remediation.

The most important part of that whole process was that it was collaborative. It was with the community. It was dealing with the scientists and consultants who were hired to come on board. There were two or three of them—one to do the work and the others to peer review. I find that part important too.

Kendrick, you and I talked about that earlier with respect to our commitment. You can rest assured that you have it from this government and from Transport Canada.

My question will be for Ms. Olsgard.

Ms. Olsgard, with respect to next steps and the establishment of a more focused community-based risk assessment, in your experience, would that cover a lot of what we're talking about in a more disciplined and structured manner?

• (1720)

**Ms. Mandy Olsgard:** Yes. That is the simple answer.

Me and other colleagues supported ACFN and MCFN, which are sitting here today, on a multi-year research program, and they've developed indigenous-use surface water and sediment water-quality guidelines that consider traditional land uses, medicinal plant use and consumption of water from any water body in the Athabasca region. In my work with the Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation, we're developing integrated environmental human health risk assessment methods and establishing guidelines for medicinal foods.

These three communities together are very advanced in how they've used science and braided it with their knowledge and informed science to move it forward in the region through interactions with consultants like me and with governments and industry. That's why I said that it's shocking to me that a risk assessment like this could happen in the region. It doesn't need to go forward. The methods are established. We know how to do collaborative, community-led research that these communities can lead.

I was a bit taken aback by the minister's letter that said they had already hired a consultant. A few lines down, it says that they've selected a consultant from the pool of government consultants. That could still be done collaboratively if you had scientists who have worked with indigenous communities and know how to integrate traditional knowledge into western science methods, but not having any information on that I thought was an interesting approach given why we're here today.

**Mr. Vance Badawey:** Chief Adam, do you find that this process, although terrible...? Again, I can relate. I've been there. I lived pretty much the entire first part of my public life dealing with an issue like this that dramatically affected the community.

Do you think, as bad as the process may be, that some good things can come out of it? We could leverage the process to, for example, establish an emergency measures plan and establish economic development possibilities and opportunities with respect to where you're located at the dock. Other infrastructure could be put in place, recognizing what would be beneficial to the community based on the resources you have available to you.

**Chief Allan Adam:** For dealing with the issue of retrofitting the dock, cleaning it up and handing it over to the community, the community would do a lot better with it and would understand it. You have to remember that the dock was designed for the sediment to come in, because it creates an eddy. Anybody who's familiar with water knows that when an eddy is created, all the sediment starts to go inside. That's what we've collected over the years, along with boating issues and contaminants from a barge that was left unattended, which Transport Canada knew about. It leaked in the area for a number of years.

What I don't understand is this. If Transport Canada was so adamant about giving us the dock and turning over the liability risk to us, why couldn't it just build us a permanent road, which is only 32 miles of construction? We would have access out of Fort Chip.

**Mr. Vance Badawey:** Thanks, Chief.

We do have the minister coming here for the next meeting. I don't want to speak for her, but she's going to have a lot to say, I assume and expect. You can rest assured that...as I said, let's get to work.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Badawey.

[Translation]

Next up is Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You said earlier that you ended up receiving a letter this morning from the Minister of Transport's office.

It's obviously strange that you would get the letter today, the very day you were meeting with the committee. It didn't come to all of you the same way. It wasn't sent to all of you directly.

The committee members did not receive the letter. Since we don't have it in front of us, it's difficult to comment on it or ask you questions about it.

Would you be able to provide a copy to the committee before we meet with the minister? That way, we could ask her about it when she appears before the committee on Thursday.

[English]

**Chief Allan Adam:** We have a copy of it right here for you.

• (1725)

[Translation]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** All right. Thank you.

I have another question for you.

If I understand correctly, the wharf site is contaminated because a Transport Canada barge was left sitting there for years. Do I have that right?

Can you tell us more about how the contamination happened?

[English]

**Chief Allan Adam:** We also have the contaminants concerns and the health and environmental concerns written in that letter.

[Translation]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** You were looking through your papers, so I'll repeat my question.

Can you tell us more about the circumstances that led to the contamination?

How was the wharf contaminated? If I understand correctly, the responsibility lies with Transport Canada, which left a barge sitting there.

Can you give us more information on that?

[English]

**Chief Allan Adam:** In 2020, Imperial Oil had a spill. We raised the issue of the contaminated water then. In 2022, we were evacuated from the community because of a wildfire. We used boats and planes. With the boats at that time, we had a hard time evacuating people. We knew then it was an issue and that if it ever occurred again, we were going to have a problem.

In 2023, when the fire broke out in Fort McMurray and surrounding areas, because the Site C dam was filling up its pond for hydroelectric, it drained the water into the Fort Chip community. We raised the alarm and stated that if we were to ever have an evacuation again, our people would not be able to evacuate in a fast manner to a safe distance. We raised the issue about the big dock. We said that if Transport Canada doesn't do it, we will do the dredging ourselves. That's when we were told that if we did it, we would be incarcerated.

Once we found out everything, Transport Canada told us to go ahead and do it. When we were given permission to do it, we hired a contractor. When we hired the contractor, we found out that all the studies were done, and they said they couldn't touch it because there were too many contaminants there.

[Translation]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Next we'll go to Mr. Bachrach.

You have two and a half minutes, sir.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The reports the government eventually produced showed that contaminants like arsenic, nickel, benzene and hydrocarbons were present on the site. These are known to cause all sorts of medical conditions, as you know, including cancer, liver failure, autoimmune diseases, leukemia and keratosis.

Could you speak to whether people in your communities have died from conditions that are linked to the specific contaminants that were found at the big dock site?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** I don't even have a number, but I'm going to say that at least 90% of the people who have passed away in our community, for as long as I know, have had some sort of illness that would be linked to this, to be honest.

We have the odd suicide or old age death, but for the majority of people—it ranges in age from children to elders—who are passing away, it's yes.

**Chief Allan Adam:** On that note, my father-in-law passed away from an aggressive cancer. I came to speak to the committee about a year ago on the Imperial Oil file. Since then, he has passed on, within six months of knowing that he was infested with cancer. My dad also passed away from stomach cancer. It's a known occurrence.

It's hard to see this as parents, and to see your parents pass on before you. Looking at your grandchildren and at all of the autoimmune diseases they have and not knowing where that's coming from is stressful enough for us.

We just want them to correct the problem.

• (1730)

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** I would like to add that the reason I'm here and Chief Billy-Joe Tuccaro is not is that his mother was re-

cently diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. She's in the final weeks of her life, and he needed to stay home to be with her.

Right there, that just brings it so much closer to home. It is for all of us. It's close to home for all of us in every aspect.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** I just want to add this real quick. That's why it's very important that we advocate for Minister Guilbeault to conduct the health study that he said he was going to do and to get assistance from the parties involved to make sure that's followed through on.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Mr. Chair, are we going to get one more round?

**The Chair:** We are indeed.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Okay. That's fine. I'll leave it at that.

Thank you for that response. I'm really sorry to hear about those instances in the community. I know it's something our committees have heard before, but it must be absolutely devastating.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach.

We'll go to Mr. Lawrence.

The floor is yours, sir. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC):** Thank you very much.

I would like to thank all of you for your testimony. Know that you have all our thoughts and prayers. More importantly, I'm hopeful we can have action so we don't have needless deaths from cancer or otherwise among the peoples of your first nations.

I want to start with Ms. Olsgard.

I understand that, as Chief Adam said, blame is not what we're trying to accomplish, but we do need to effect change. I want to establish a chronology so that we can effect change.

Ms. Olsgard, I believe you said that as part of the environmental assessment, there is an obligation—if I'm saying it too strongly, please correct me—of notification and that should have occurred in or before 2017.

**Ms. Mandy Olsgard:** I don't know if I called it an "obligation", but it's step 3 in the federal contaminated sites action plan guidance that you notify and engage stakeholders about known or documented contamination at a federally contaminated site. I would probably call it guidance.

I reviewed only the 2017 studies. We didn't have access to the previous ones or funds for that. In those studies, it appears to me that it was designated a contaminated site in 2014, so whoever the government of the day was in 2014 would have had the responsibility to notify the stakeholders.

I'll leave it there. I'll see if I get a question about health effects.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Thank you, Ms. Olsgard.

For the chiefs and the president, were you, your first nations or Métis peoples notified at any time in or before 2017 of the potential contamination of the big dock?

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** Once again, no, we weren't notified. We know of the bulk fuel spill, the sunken tugboat, the Imperial Oil spill, the gas and oil from other boats and the uranium transfer. That stuff all happened at the big dock. Transport Canada is pretty aware of it.

We don't want any more testing. We all know the truth. Let's act on it. Let's collaborate on scheduling.

That's all I can say right now.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Thank you very much, President Cardinal. I appreciate that.

I brought a motion on October 3 asking for the production of documents and requesting documentation with respect to the contamination of the big dock from Transport Canada. That motion has now been outstanding for over a month, and we have not received those documents from Transport Canada.

I would like UC to bring a second motion with the simple amendment of adding a deadline of December 14. I'll tell you why. It's because if they don't get those documents, they can expect to get their asses hauled up here in front of Parliament to explain why the hell they haven't produced them.

Do I have UC for that?

**The Chair:** I'm going to go around the table to see if we have UC.

Mr. Lawrence is asking for UC to produce the documents that he requested by December 14.

**Mr. Vance Badawey:** I have two things.

If I recall, the motion said it was going back to 2017. Is that correct?

• (1735)

**The Chair:** The motion said going back to 2017.

**Mr. Vance Badawey:** Okay. I would like it to go back even further than that.

Second, because of translation, I'm not sure the department can get the documents until later on.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** It's been two months and this is the answer we get.

**Mr. Vance Badawey:** I didn't realize we were in debate right now.

**The Chair:** Hold on, everyone. Let's make sure you have the floor and that you're recognized by the chair if we're in debate.

There's a motion put forward by the vice-chair, Mr. Lawrence, to have UC. We're having a discussion. Mr. Badawey is asking now for it to be amended to go even further back than 2017.

**Mr. Vance Badawey:** It should go back at least to 2014.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** We're happy to have those discussions. I would just like to get UC, because we've already had this—

**Mr. Vance Badawey:** When we have those discussions, you can put the UC motion forward.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** We've already had the request. Transport Canada has had it since October 3. It's now been two months. No, I don't want to restart the clock, Vance.

I'm happy to meet with you in good faith. You know, Vance, that we've had good discussions before.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, it doesn't look like we have UC at the moment. We can continue the discussion another time.

Right now, I suggest we focus—

**Chief Allan Adam:** May I make a recommendation? It's the same recommendation that Transport Canada gave to us. Your colleague mentioned they want this report done within two months. If it's not concluded in two months, maybe it's time to incarcerate some people for the wrongdoing.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Chief Adam.

I'll turn the floor back over to you, Mr. Lawrence. You have one minute and 30 seconds left.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Thank you very much, Chair.

That's disappointing, as I'm sure those documents would be quite revealing.

I know my colleague already talked about this, but just to be clear, contamination has been established since at least 2014 and probably before then, and you've not received any sort of notification to the general community with signage or otherwise. If not for your excellent work, we would still have children running in the water to swim. We would still have individuals trying to catch fish, if not for your work, because Transport Canada still has not gotten to work.

**Chief Allan Adam:** There's been nothing at all, to this point, in my view. It's a shame in this day and age with the technology that's out there. With a push of a button that says "enter" and "send", we would receive it within 30 seconds.

I correspond with my team on everything I get through email. Nothing goes unturned. If this had been sent to my email address back in 2016, I assure you that this whole dock remediation would have been done a long time ago, but unfortunately it was not.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Chief Adam.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** Can I add to that?

**The Chair:** Yes, of course, Mr. Cardinal.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** Is there a way that I can recommend a motion?

**The Chair:** You can't.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** Okay. Thanks.

Can I suggest one?



**The Chair:** You can suggest one to a member, President Cardinal, and a member of the committee can then propose it during their speaking time.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** That's perfect.

I'd like to propose—

**The Chair:** If you could write it out, sir, and give it to one of the members, they'll do it for you and we'll gladly present it.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** I want everybody to hear it.

**The Chair:** It will be read out by the member.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** Okay. I'll do that, then. Thanks.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, President Cardinal.

Next I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

I have a point of order from Mr. Badawey first.

**Mr. Vance Badawey:** I have some advice for Mr. Cardinal.

If you add it into one of your answers or even your comments, it automatically goes, as a part of your testimony, to the analysts. Then when we get to the final report, it will be added to it and a recommendation can come out of it.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** On the same point of order, can we let Mr. Cardinal give his proposed motion?

**The Chair:** Your microphone is on, sir. You can turn it into a suggestion to the chair, and the analysts will write it down. We'll use it when we're analyzing all that was said during the testimony, sir.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I recommend a motion that \$25 million be allocated for the remediation of the big dock wharf in Fort Chipewyan and that there be a constant funding agreement for the next 50 years so the three nations are able to maintain the dock.

• (1740)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That's now on the record, and it's something the analysts heard.

I'll turn the floor over to you now, Mr. Rogers.

**Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to our witnesses today.

I certainly sympathize with you and your frustrations on this particular issue. Based on your testimony, Chief Adam, it has obviously been around for a long time. I really appreciate your opening remarks about not pointing fingers at anybody. It has been successive governments doing this, and what you're here for today is to find a solution to the problem. That's what we want as well.

Given that Transport Canada refused to dredge the dock area, as you articulated, and given your suggestion based on that—you were talking about doing it yourselves and then you couldn't—I just want to ask you this very simply: What are some of your recommendations or suggestions to this committee that we could bring forward going forward?

Any of you are welcome to answer that.

**Chief Allan Adam:** I'm glad you mentioned recommendations, because we have some recommendations for you to take forward.

What we recommend to Transport Canada is that they share all studies and reports on the big dock that have been kept from us. If there are more, send them to us.

Come to our community to address our citizens and apologize to them about what has happened over the years.

Prepare a work plan to remediate the environmental contamination of the big dock. This is to be informed by the new environmental study conducted by the three nations of Fort Chipewyan using indigenous criteria for human health and environmental risk assessment. This test must include the entire waterfront in and around the big dock area. That means testing not only the big dock but the outside of it as well during the environmental risk assessment.

The extent of the contamination was never defined in the 2017 study. It only said that the dock was for commercial use. It was never for recreational or community use. That was only based on Transport Canada using it commercially. We want to know what kind of health study there was, because our kids have been playing there ever since then. It says that if you start mixing up the sediments, it's going to be more harmful to human health than if they were left undisturbed.

Redesign and repair the big dock so it's suitable for recreation and commercial traffic, as well as for emergency egress passage. That means we'll have safe passage in and out of the community if there is an emergency situation. Also, have it be recreational so our kids can swim in that area, because not everybody is going to control their kids.

Immediately test all drinking water wells in the impacted area highlighted in the 2017 report that are said to be in jeopardy of contamination.

Install signage on Transport Canada property notifying residents of the risk posed by swimming, fishing and harvesting. Why did we as a community have to put up signage for Transport Canada stating that this water is contaminated? You should have done that yourselves.

Dredge the harbour and the channel in Lake Athabasca so it's suitable and safe for marine traffic, meaning that if we have to use it to get out of the community in an emergency situation, we are able to do so.

Present an evacuation plan, including the installation of a temporary dock while the remediation construction is ongoing. We need a dock in place while this remediation is happening with the existing dock.

Reimburse nations for all expenses incurred when they conducted their own environmental studies of the big dock. That's related to their review of the 2017 report.

Undertake an internal investigation into why residents were not informed of a contaminated site in the centre of their community as soon as officials learned of this problem. Report the findings of this investigation to the residents of Fort Chipewyan, with commitments demonstrating how such inaction will never be allowed to happen again, and what disciplinary actions have been taken against those responsible. There have been none so far.

Follow through with all recommendations in the 2017 study.

● (1745)

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** Can I add to that?

**Mr. Churence Rogers:** Mr. Chair, I want to make one comment. Then Ms. Tuccaro can probably make a comment.

**The Chair:** Sure, go ahead, Mr. Rogers. Then we'll let Ms. Tuccaro go.

**Mr. Churence Rogers:** It's important to the committee that all of these ideas, recommendations, solutions and suggestions are submitted in writing so that we make no mistake about what you people are saying.

Go ahead, Ms. Tuccaro.

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** Thank you.

I'd like to add that we're looking for capacity funding for mental health support to address the anxiety and fears instilled in our people by all of the stuff going on that's tied to the contamination.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Councillor Tuccaro.

I saw Ms. Olsgard's hand up.

Are you having a technical issue, Ms. Olsgard?

**Ms. Mandy Olsgard:** No. I just thought that if I'm giving testimony, I have a recommendation.

Was that only to the leaders?

**The Chair:** He threw the question out. He ran out of time, though.

Could you submit it in writing? Perhaps one of the members can ask you a question on that.

Actually, I have chair's prerogative. I would very much like to hear what you have to say so we can have the analysts take it down.

Ms. Olsgard, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Mandy Olsgard:** As part of the delineation and the follow-up studies, apportion the sources of the contamination and determine what is locally caused by the TC wharf activities and what is caused cumulatively by oil sands development in the region since they have the same classes of contaminants. That specifically relates to the sediments in the surface water.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Olsgard.

I'll now turn the floor over to Mrs. Goodridge once again.

You have five minutes.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Thank you.

I've reviewed the 2017 document of that report, as well as the one from September 2024. I'm not a scientist, but I think they show pretty clearly that Transport Canada and some of its bureaucrats really dropped the ball. Do you think they should be held liable for the risk they have put to your community?

I'll start with President Cardinal and move down the line.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** Definitely. As I said before, we know the truth. We want to start collaborating. They need to be held reliable. Is it "reliable"?

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** You mean "liable".

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** Yes, liable—sorry about that. They need to be held liable for what's been done.

Thank you for correcting me.

**Chief Allan Adam:** When you speak about them being held liable and accountable for their actions, it comes to this point: How are we going to address this issue when nobody is being honest at the department itself? We can't even hold them to account because nobody even wants to incarcerate them. Even though we find that funny—

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** It's not.

**Chief Allan Adam:** —the department sent an email to us stating that if we do these things, the chief will be incarcerated. That's the account that Canada wants to hold.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** There's a double standard.

Go ahead, Councillor Tuccaro.

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** I definitely agree that they should be held liable. That comes back to my comment about adding funding for mental health support and addressing the anxiety that is tied to all of this.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** You all have made a more than 4,000-kilometre trip to come to Ottawa to have your voices heard. There are some very serious issues in your community as a direct result of the failure from Transport Canada.

Has the minister offered up any time to meet with you while you're here?

**Chief Allan Adam:** No, she hasn't. All she did was address that she was going to look at it and that she was newly appointed to this thing because of former minister Pablo Rodriguez, who was too busy at the time thinking about the Quebec election and that he wanted to run provincially. He just sat back and said that this was too important for him, that he couldn't jeopardize his position and that he was just going to move on and let a different minister deal with this issue. That's the response we got from them.

• (1750)

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** You've had minister after minister fail you. You have made this very long trip, so would you make time in your busy schedules—because I know you have very busy schedules—to meet with the minister if she somehow found the availability? I know there are some staff from the ministry office sitting back there. Maybe they're going to listen and can bring this forward to the minister. Would you make time if the minister could make time for you?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** We would. My flight to go back home is scheduled for tomorrow morning, so it would have to be sometime this evening.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Do you think it's pretty disturbing that the minister isn't making time to meet with you despite saying this is so important? She sent a letter to one out of three organizations at the eleventh hour. You had been planning to come here for a while. It isn't like this is some surprise or some new thing.

What does this tell the community about how important Fort Chipewyan is to the Government of Canada and this Liberal government?

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** I believe there's neglect of the importance, obviously. Hopefully, we don't get a resignation of another minister so that it keeps on going. Great leadership shows collaboration.

I have faith in Minister Anand to set the meeting, and I am here all week if any ministers would like to meet with us as three nations to work forward to make sure this is addressed.

**Chief Allan Adam:** I'm here until Friday. Minister Anand didn't reach out to us with regard to being part of the discussion, but we invite her to if she wants to have a discussion moving forward. Actually, I invite everybody to come to the discussion and to fix this problem because this problem is ongoing. It should have been rectified and remediated in 2017 if the study came out in 2016, or back in 1997. When do you want to take responsibility for all the inaction taking place? I don't want to be pointing fingers at anybody in this regard. All I want to do is go back to my community and tell the people of our community that it's safe to go swimming because we remediated the plan, but no plan has been put in place thus far.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Thank you.

Really quickly, it's been established that there is contamination in the community and that no signage was put up by the Government of Canada. Has the Government of Canada done anything to alert anyone in the community other than your three nations?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** No, although it was brought to our attention that there were federal employees at the dock I think about a week....

**Chief Allan Adam:** It was in August.

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** Yes. It was after our meeting.

When we were on our phone call with her, we asked what these employees were doing there, because nobody would tell us. We did learn, though, that they were there for other reasons in relation to repairing the dock itself. We assumed that they were there in response to the contamination, but they were there to fix the dock.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Councillor.

Go ahead, President Cardinal.

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** Regardless of that situation, there is still no communication with the nations on whether they're going to fix the dock or not. There is still no consultation at all.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, President Cardinal and Councillor Tuccaro.

We'll now turn the floor over to Monsieur Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lauzon, you may go ahead. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm sympathetic to what you've been through, and I appreciate everything you've shared with us today.

When something affects our children, our families, it's personal. This isn't a partisan issue. It's about finding solutions to fix this.

Mrs. Goodridge mentioned some key dates, in particular, reports from 2017 and 2024.

I'd like you to talk about a year that was very important in this whole process. I'm talking about 2013, when the contamination was identified. Were you aware? Were you able to communicate with the Canadian government in 2013, the year that the contamination around the wharf site was detected?

[*English*]

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** On behalf of the Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation, there were no communications. I can't speak for the other nations, but I know that for our nation, there was absolutely no indication of any communications in 2013...to the last implications we had.

• (1755)

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** What about the other nations in 2013?

**Ms. Tammie Tuccaro:** I'm also unsure if any communication was made at that time, as I'm newer to office. That's something we would have to look into.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Can you look into that and send us the information if it's possible?

**Chief Allan Adam:** I can speak to that matter, because I became the chief in 2013.

At the time, former minister of environment Peter Kent, along with the former minister of transport, did indicate that they wanted to give the dock to the community, but there was no mention, at any point in time, that it was contaminated, even back then.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** That's part of my next question about the transfer of the infrastructure.

Do you think that at that time, they should have told you about the possibility of the contamination when they asked to transfer the dock?

**Chief Allan Adam:** Yes, they should have notified us right away, and they should have notified us about the remediation plan. It should have been put in place, but nothing has been put in place. There is no remediation plan whatsoever, other than giving the responsibility of the big dock to the community so that all liability risk will be taken away from Transport Canada.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** I'm not sure I understood that. Did you have the chance to meet with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Steven Guilbeault, in Fort Chipewyan on August 7 of this year? Did any of you meet with Steven Guilbeault?

[English]

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** Yes. Three leaders—me, Chief Adam and Chief Billy-Joe Tuccaro—had the liberty of—

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Was there a minister directly there on the site?

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** Yes, Minister Steven Guilbeault was there.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** In your discussions, Mr. Guilbeault said that everyone has the right to live in a healthy environment.

Was any money put towards studies to assess the situation in your communities in relation to the oil sands?

[English]

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** It was not specific to the big dock but specific to a health study for the community of Fort Chipewyan because of our ongoing requests. It was for the cancer rates. That was why he committed to \$12.5 million, I believe. Is that right?

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** It was a little more than that, but that's okay.

[Translation]

Like my fellow member, I'm from the municipal world. I, too, had to deal with contaminated water situations. It always comes down to the bylaws. Municipalities have bylaws for zoning and infrastructure.

How did the municipality zone the area where the wharf is located given its potential use? Was it zoned for commercial or residential use?

[English]

**Chief Allan Adam:** There is no zoning, and there's nothing to it. Nothing at all has been registered as to what it's listed for, other than the fact that people need it for supplies coming into the community. It's just a drop-off as far as Transport Canada is concerned. They don't look at it as recreational use by the community. They overlook that issue. They look at it only from the point of transporting goods from A to B.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** You said that you've used that space for three decades, that all families use it, and there's a park beside it.

**Chief Allan Adam:** I'm 58 years old. That dock has been in the same location since long before I became available here on this earth in 1966.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** The closest I've been is Fort McMurray. I've never been there, but I used to go see what is over there. Thank you.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

[English]

Thank you very much, Chief Adam.

[Translation]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, we now go to you for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to say that I will be passing on all the documents you gave me earlier to the clerk, so all the committee members have a chance to look at them before the next meeting.

Ms. Olsgard, the first nations want to be able to use what is there, but they also want the site to be decontaminated. Chief Adam could have been put in jail because he said he wanted to dredge the area.

Given your expertise as a toxicologist, I'd like to know whether it's possible to dredge the area in a way that ensures protection from exposure to toxic substances and contaminants? Is it possible to dredge and decontaminate the area at the same time?

I am inclined to think so, but I'm not an expert.

• (1800)

[English]

**Ms. Mandy Olsgard:** I don't do remediation, but I develop remedial objectives for them. If you look in British Columbia, in Vancouver, they dredge the harbour almost every year. When you undertake dredging activities, there will be resuspension of sediments and increased risk during the remedial activities, and signage is put up. That's part of the process.

In this case, a risk assessment was done to inform remedial options. The remedial option based on the risk assessment was that remediation was not required. We've discussed a lot today about why that happened, and it's because the human exposure pathways were not considered.

The first thing that would need to happen at the big dock is understanding the source of the contamination to the sediments. This is downstream of a naturally occurring oil sands deposit. It's downstream of one of the largest developments, with effluents going into the river, and then it has local contamination from the wharf. You'd have to characterize and figure out what the sources are and then determine the most appropriate way to remediate, given that you're going to have a continually ongoing source from the natural oil sands and from oil sands development. This could be a situation where you have to remediate consistently or have some mitigation put in place to treat incoming waters and sediments from the lower Athabasca River.

I'm sorry; I'm not trying to contradict leadership here, but it's a complex situation where you have natural and anthropogenic factors that are contaminating the sediments. The soil and the groundwater are local and easy to remediate. The sediments in the lake are a different issue that's going to require a really robust environmental site assessment, remedial option planning and then a remedial plan to protect everyone who uses the lake and the beach area.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** If I understand what you just said correctly, cleaning up the site doesn't mean it won't become contaminated again if the source of the contamination isn't dealt with.

Is that correct?

[*English*]

**Ms. Mandy Olsgard:** It's very likely in this area, and that was a deficiency of the studies. They never identified the source of the contamination of the sediments because they never achieved delineation.

When you get access to the 2017 reports, you will see site characterization maps where they took soil samples. Where they're red, they're over guidelines. Where they're green, they're under guidelines. They are always red. No matter how far they went out in those plans, sediments were never clean or safe or below the guidelines we use in Alberta. They have to figure out why that is before they spend a lot of money remediating. It doesn't mean it doesn't need to happen, but they have to determine the source and the best path forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Olsgard.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Finally, for today, we have Mr. Bachrach.

The floor is yours, sir, for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have two brief questions, and then I'd like to move a motion that I hope my colleagues will support.

To the nations that are here today, aside from Transport Canada, what other departments have you contacted about dredging?

**Mr. Kendrick Cardinal:** We haven't contacted anybody about dredging, as far as I know.

I did want to mention some topics on dredging. Transport Canada has been dredging for 40 to 50 years on the Athabasca River, and dredging this thing is not a big issue, so let's get the job done. They've been dredging up and down the Athabasca River from mile one, which is in Fort McMurray at Waterways, right down to mile 200 at Fort Chipewyan. Dredging has been done without any logistics in reports or testing. They just dredged a river and did whatever they wanted. This is just another...

• (1805)

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Go ahead, Chief Adam, briefly.

**Chief Allan Adam:** We've been in contact with Indigenous Services Canada. We've been in contact with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans regarding emergency management. We've also been in contact with the Prime Minister's Office on this whole issue, and none of them have offered to help dredge the big dock.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Okay, thank you.

If I may, given where we're at with time, I'd like to move a motion.

One of the most concerning issues that have come up at this meeting is that in the letter received today from the Minister of Transport, she indicates her officials have been able to confirm that environmental reports describing and addressing the contamination in greater detail had been previously shared with the Mikisew Cree First Nation and Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation, but the witnesses who are present today have not been able to confirm those communications at their end of things. I'm not going to ascribe motive or suggest that the communications weren't sent, but I think the minister should provide some evidence of those communications so the committee can understand how and when the communities were notified.

I would like to move:

That the committee order Transport Canada to produce by Wednesday, December 4, 2024, all communications by which the department or third parties notified the Fort Chipewyan Métis Nation and Mikisew Cree First Nation of environmental reports describing the contamination at "Big Dock", as described in the minister's Tuesday, December 3, 2024, letter.

**The Chair:** That is so moved, Mr. Bachrach.

I have a speaking list already. We'll go to Mr. Lawrence first.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** The Conservatives are pleased to support this.

**The Chair:** Do any members want to confer on this? Do we want it translated before we move forward? Does anybody want me to suspend for two minutes to discuss it, or is everybody copacetic?

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** I'd love to see unanimous consent on this.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Rogers.

**Mr. Churence Rogers:** I suggest we suspend for two minutes.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** That's shameful.

**The Chair:** Okay, a member would like to suspend for two minutes.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Mr. Chair, just before we suspend, if I may just characterize.... Is it clear to everyone what we're trying to get here? We're not trying to get extensive documents and the reports and all of that stuff. We're just looking for evidence that on certain dates, the department or other third parties, like environmental consultants, indeed communicated with the nations as indicated in the minister's letter.

We're not suggesting that didn't happen. It would just be good to know when that occurred and who the information was sent to.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, I'm going to suspend, because a member would like to confer for two minutes. We'll reconvene in two minutes. I have no intention of concluding this meeting. It's far too important.

• (1805) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1810)

**The Chair:** I call this meeting back to order.

Mr. Bachrach, you had your hand up. Do you want to continue the discussion?

• (1815)

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to my colleagues for the conversations during the recess.

There was some indication from the government side that perhaps a bit more time would be helpful as long as the committee has

the documents prior to our meeting. We settled on December 5 at 10 a.m. as being adequate time to review the documents prior to the meeting, which is scheduled, I believe, for 3.30 on Thursday.

I know I can't amend my own motion.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** I'll move that.

**The Chair:** That's moved by Mrs. Goodridge. I see a lot of nodding heads.

Colleagues, do we have unanimous consent?

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

(Motion as amended agreed to)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach.

Colleagues, let's give a short thank you to our witnesses.

President Cardinal, Chief Adam, Councillor Tuccaro and Chief Operating Officer Courtoreille, I want to thank you so much for your time here today and for sharing your very important testimony on what is a very important study for this committee.

Of course, Ms. Olsgard, thank you for joining us virtually and lending your expertise to this study. It's greatly appreciated.

I wish you a wonderful stay in Ottawa. For those of you returning home, I wish you safe travels home.

This meeting is adjourned.









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