



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

AANO • NUMBER 034 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, February 6, 2007

—
Chair

Mr. Colin Mayes

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Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC)): I open the meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development of Tuesday, February 6, 2007.

Committee members, you have the orders of the day in front of you. For the first hour, we'll have a report on aboriginal housing. Witnesses are from Statistics Canada. Then at 12 noon, we will be going in camera and finalizing the post-secondary education study and also reviewing some committee business.

The first order of the day is that today we have witnesses from Statistics Canada. We have Rosemary Bender, the director general of social and demographic statistics, and Marie Patry, assistant director, aboriginal data, social and aboriginal statistics division.

Welcome. I understand you are going to give us a presentation, so please begin. Thank you.

Mrs. Rosemary Bender (Director General, Social and Demographic Statistics, Statistics Canada): Thank you and good morning, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank you for this invitation to appear before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I'm pleased to present to you an overview of data that's available from Statistics Canada on aboriginal housing.

Before I begin, I have a note on the definitions of aboriginal populations, for there are various definitions available. The data presented to you are all based on the concept referred to as the aboriginal identity population. This is measured through a question that asks if a person is an aboriginal person, that is, North American Indian, Inuit, or Métis.

Statistics Canada has two main sources of data on aboriginal housing: the Census of Population and the Aboriginal Peoples Survey. There is far too much information available from these sources to present in the short time I have available. Rather, the objective this morning is to provide you with the main trends in the housing situation with regard to the aboriginal identity population, as well as illustrate some of the geographic and demographic characteristics attributable to the data.

Government and academic researchers examining aboriginal housing policies and programs extensively use these and other more detailed aboriginal data that are available from Statistics Canada. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation also derive and publish a number of key housing measures, many of which are based on census data.

The following slides, which you have in front of you, are based on data from the 2001 census and the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey. These will be updated in the coming year, starting next month, with the 2006 census population and dwelling count to be released March 13, with more detailed results on the aboriginal identity population to be available next January, 2008, and results from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey off-reserve in the fall of 2008. Updates for the on-reserve component of the Aboriginal Peoples Survey will be available progressively in the coming years as reserves participate in the survey.

Following an overview of the demographic situation of the aboriginal population, I will speak to four main housing variables available from the census and the Aboriginal Peoples Survey: condition of dwelling, number of rooms, tenure, and water contamination.

In 2001, there were just over one million aboriginal people, or 3.5% of the total population—and I apologize in advance for all the numbers that I will be throwing your way. You will find them all in your handouts. Two-thirds of aboriginal people, or 713,000, were North American Indian. Métis represented 29% of the aboriginal people with 306,000, and Inuit represented 4% with 48,000.

In 2005, Statistics Canada projected the aboriginal population to the year 2017. With a projected decline in fertility rates, their population growth is expected to slow down. Nevertheless, over the projected period it will still average two and a half times that of the non-aboriginal population. The Inuit population will grow the fastest, followed by the North American Indian and the Métis populations.

In 2001, the on-reserve population represented almost one-third of all aboriginal people. By 2017, the share of those on-reserve could rise to 40% if current trends in fertility, mortality, and migration continue.

Seven out of ten aboriginal persons live off-reserve, which leaves three in ten living on reserve. Twenty-nine per cent live in large cities, 23% in smaller cities, 14% live in rural areas, while 4% live in the Arctic.

•(1110)

As with all census information, this type of regional breakdown is available for each of the three aboriginal groups. For example, Métis have the highest percentage living in urban areas, at 68%, and Inuit the lowest, at 27%. This compares with the 80% of all Canadians who live in urban areas.

Half of the aboriginal identity population is under 25 years of age. Age is a key demographic characteristic in the context of family formation and the related new demand for housing, as well as in the context of planning for the needs of an older population.

With a higher fertility rate than the non-aboriginal population, the aboriginal populations are younger. For example, children under 15 years of age represent one-third of the aboriginal population; in contrast, they make up only one-fifth of the non-aboriginal population.

The number of aboriginal seniors is growing, but still remains relatively small. Seniors represent 4% of the aboriginal population, compared to 13% of the non-aboriginal.

I would now like to present you with some of the data available on aboriginal housing.

[*Translation*]

I will begin with the subject of overcrowding.

Overcrowding is defined as more than one person per room.

The housing situation depends to a large extent on where one lives, thus the aboriginal housing data are provided according to the following types of geographic areas: reserves, rural areas, the Arctic, small urban areas and census metropolitan areas.

Despite a small improvement between 1996 and 2001, the proportion of aboriginal people living in overcrowded dwellings remains quite high compared to the situation of non-aboriginal people, especially on reserves and in the Arctic.

Data on overcrowding are also available for the largest urban areas, and the results vary across the country.

For the aboriginal population, the percentage of the population living in overcrowded dwellings is substantially higher in the western cities. In particular, Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon and Edmonton have percentages 2 to 3.5 times that of the non-aboriginal population in these cities.

In contrast, for the central cities of Montreal, Ottawa-Gatineau and Toronto, the percentage of overcrowded dwellings for the aboriginal population is equal to or lower than that for the non-aboriginal population.

We can also examine these data for the first nation communities specifically.

For all first nation communities in Canada, 35% of dwellings are overcrowded. Among provinces, the highest incidences of overcrowding for first nation communities occur in the three Prairie Provinces, followed by Quebec.

Let us now turn to housing conditions. For Canada as a whole, dwellings in need of major repairs represent about 9% of all dwellings. From the census, we can see that this percentage is much higher for the aboriginal population living in each type of geographic area presented. In particular, the proportion living in reserves, at almost 40%, is very high. In addition, the data over two censuses also show that the percentage for the reserves and for the Arctic is increasing over time. The 2006 census will indicate to what extent this trend continues.

I will now talk about dwellings as such rather than about the number of persons per dwelling.

Across Canada, one in five aboriginal dwellings needs major repairs. Among provinces, the proportion is highest in New Brunswick, where more than one in four dwellings need major repairs. The percentages for the other provinces range from 18 to 25%, with Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia having proportions below the national average of 20% for aboriginal dwellings.

If we look specifically at reserves, overall 36% of all dwellings on reserve are in need of major repairs, about the same percentage noted earlier for dwellings that are considered to be overcrowded. Compared to all aboriginal housing, on-reserve housing is about 1.5 times more in need of major repairs.

Across the provinces, Prince Edward Island and the three Prairie Provinces all have 40% or more of aboriginal dwellings in need of major repairs. Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, Yukon and the Northwest Territories have relatively lower proportions of dwellings in need of major repairs, with percentages under 30%.

Note that Nunavut does not have any reserves.

•(1115)

[*English*]

The status on housing conditions of aboriginal people is also available according to tenure, that is, whether the dwelling is owned or rented. Dwellings owned by aboriginal people are twice as likely to require major repairs as dwellings owned by non-aboriginal people. In general, dwellings that are rented are more in need of major repairs than those that are owned. However, whether we look at aboriginal or non-aboriginal populations, the type of geographic area, be it on-reserve, rural, or urban, has a much larger impact on the need for major repairs than whether it is owned or rented.

In the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, respondents were asked whether or not they felt their water was contaminated at certain times of the year. According to the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 18% of aboriginal persons living off-reserve said there were times of the year when their water was contaminated. At 37%, the proportion was twice as high for aboriginal persons living in the Arctic. The percentages for those living in other rural and urban areas were relatively close to the off-reserve average of 18%. So there are lots of numbers.

In summary, housing conditions for aboriginal peoples are much more severe than for the general population, especially on-reserve, in rural areas, and in the Arctic, where the proportion of houses needing major repairs is at least three times higher than the Canadian average. Dwellings owned by aboriginal people are twice as likely to require major repairs as dwellings owned by non-aboriginal people. Overcrowding of aboriginal dwellings remains quite high compared to the situation of non-aboriginal people, despite a small improvement between 1996 and 2001, especially on-reserve and in the Arctic.

This concludes my presentation. My colleague Marie and I will be glad to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you.

I would ask the Liberal side whether they would like to ask any questions.

Mr. Merasty.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, let me thank you for your presentation.

I have grown to appreciate the hard work of people who collect data and statistics, having focused a lot of my work in the past on this area, as a driver of public policy—and of circumstances that are described and painted as accurately as you can. Your work is sometimes very difficult, so I appreciate your presentation.

I have a lead-off question, right off the bat, with the collection of the data as specific to population projections, before I get into the housing. What do you think your limitations are with respect to the growth projections you've used and use currently for the aboriginal population growth? The reason I ask this is that in my experience we've run into situations where—and you mention fertility rates here, that they should decline—the assumption sometimes is that you base it on the Canadian average fertility rate instead of the aboriginal population fertility rate, and that skews numbers. We find that previous statistics that have been collected always seem to underestimate the actual growth that the next set of statistics have.

Do you know if there is some limitation so that maybe we can start to see a more accurate leveling off of population and more accurate projections?

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: The projections of the aboriginal populations were done specifically for each of the three main groups. They were prepared using information from the 1996 and 2001 censuses—so a lot of the growth and a lot of the assumptions were based on that period—as well as using information that we do have available on fertility, migration, and mortality available from the census and from the information on registered Indians.

This information is projected to 2017, based on the trends that we have observed over the past five years. How these trends will continue is really part of the assumptions we have made. We will be looking closely as these data become updated with the 2006 census data, to provide even more recent projections of the population.

Mr. Gary Merasty: I know the census sometimes doesn't penetrate the aboriginal community deeply enough, so then the projections are not as accurate and we have people complaining that they're not represented in the numbers. But I think it's important to note that these provide a trend, and that's key.

The second question is on housing. Are there any statistics on the rates of construction of new homes in aboriginal communities, or more specifically in first nation communities?

Ms. Marie Patry (Assistant Director, Aboriginal Data, Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division, Statistics Canada): We don't collect this type of information. CMHC and INAC are coming to the committee. They should have this type of information, I presume.

Mr. Gary Merasty: How about information on the types of occupants? For example, how many social assistance recipients are living in these on-reserve houses? Do you have any of that data?

• (1125)

Ms. Marie Patry: We have some information on the sources of income, so people receiving government transfers would be the best approximation of people receiving social benefits.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Did you find a correlation between those living on social assistance and the rates of major repairs required to correlate?

Ms. Marie Patry: We haven't done these studies.

The Chair: Madam Karetak-Lindell.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Thank you.

I also want to thank Statistics Canada for the work they do. I know they've been quite successful in the north. I got called at 9 o'clock at night for the aboriginal survey, so I know they're working pretty hard. I know there were people in our northern communities over the summer or fall, so I know they're trying very hard to get the statistics.

I'm trying to, again, see a connection between the moneys that are earmarked for housing. We sometimes don't know if they are directly used for housing. I know that's not part of your study, but with the amount of investments going to the community now and the numbers that you have, do you have any idea when, in numbers of years, at the rate that we're going, we would alleviate the overcrowding in the communities? Do you have a projection of how many years that would take, at the current trend of investment of both the federal government and provincial and territorial governments? At the rate we're going now, how long do you think it would take us to at least alleviate the overcrowding in the aboriginal community?

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: We do not do any projections for the rates of construction of housing. What the census can provide is regular updates on the numbers of housing, the types of housing, and the level of overcrowding, as well as the conditions of housing. This can be updated on a regular basis through the Census of Population. We do not have projections.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: The reason I asked that is that you had one where you're showing an increase from 1996 to 2001 of dwellings needing major repairs, and you also had another one where the numbers are going higher. Actually, the one on aboriginal people is going down, but the one for repairs is going up. I wondered if that was also a way to show whether we're slowly eating away at it or we're not.

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: Yes, the 2006 information will be able to provide you with an update on that as well, to be able to indicate whether the trend is actually continuing.

The Chair: Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): I will try to be quick so that my colleague may also ask a question.

Do your data pertain exclusively to reserves recognized by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada?

Ms. Marie Patry: Yes, these reserves are recognized by the Department of Indian Affairs.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Are communities which are not recognized as reserves by the department also included in your statistics?

Ms. Marie Patry: That depends on the type of community. A small rural municipality would be found in the same column as rural regions. A small urban centre would be grouped with data on urban centres located outside of metropolitan areas.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Where would the community of Kitcisakik, located in La Vérendrye Park, be categorized?

Ms. Marie Patry: Most likely under data on rural regions. I can double check that.

• (1130)

Mr. Marc Lemay: On page 4 of your written submission, it says that by the year 2017, more than 60% of aboriginals—a word which I do not like—will be living off reserves. Is this correct?

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: Indeed, according to our forecasts, the percentage of the population living off reserves by 2017 will be 60%.

Mr. Marc Lemay: More than 60%.

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: Exactly.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Do your forecasts specify whether these aboriginals will be living in an urban setting, a semi-urban setting, or a rural region? Is this asking too much of you?

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: We do not have those details with us today, but we do have the province-by-province breakdown.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I will hand over the time remaining to my colleague, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you.

With respect to funding for housing, you report a shortfall in the communities, based on what is paid for by aboriginals, which you cover. How are you able to determine the shortfall in housing funding, and monitor the incomes of persons living in these communities?

Where is Nunavik in all of your calculations? Do your calculations factor in the detrimental effects caused by climate change?

Ms. Marie Patry: If I understood your question correctly, you wish to know how Statistics Canada obtains funds for housing on behalf of the communities.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: You distribute funds based on the shortfall, and residents pay based on their income. Where and how do you collect your data on the incomes of residents living in these dwellings, whether they are apartment buildings or separate dwellings?

Ms. Marie Patry: Firstly, Statistics Canada does not hand out funds for housing, because that is not within our mandate. We collect information. With respect to data on people's income, through our census, we ask residents what their sources of income are. This then allows us to calculate their incomes.

We also gather information on the portion of incomes allocated to housing, whether it be a mortgage or rent.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: I do not believe that Nunavik is included in the reserves. Where are the statistics for Nunavik?

Ms. Marie Patry: It is possible to obtain information on incomes of the people of Nunavik through the census, in exactly the same way as is done for other aboriginal groups. In fact, the same question is put to everybody.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: However, you are not responsible for housing needs.

Ms. Marie Patry: That falls under the purview of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation or the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Thank you.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I would like you to make a forecast. By 2017, within 10 years, will the aboriginal, Inuit or Metis population be living on or off reserves?

Ms. Marie Patry: There will always be people living on reserves and others who live off reserves.

According to our estimates, 40% of the aboriginal population will be living on reserves. Currently, the figure is approximately 30%. Therefore, there will be an increase. However, the hypotheses on which these projections are based must remain the same. And yet, we have no control over those factors. That is why our projections must be revised regularly, to take into account the most recent data. The following projections were made based on the 2005 data, which covers the period ending in 2017.

• (1135)

Mr. Marc Lemay: How do you go about—

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you for coming before the committee. I have a couple of questions on data gathering.

My understanding is that this is based strictly on self-identification. Would the people on reserve during the census have to self-identify?

Ms. Marie Patry: Yes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So there is no differentiation made between status versus non-status in this data.

Ms. Marie Patry: Not directly, but indirectly we can obtain information on the non-status population.

Ms. Jean Crowder: How do you obtain it indirectly?

Ms. Marie Patry: There are four questions on the census. There is one that deals with identity, as Rosemary has explained to you. There's another one that asks people if they are treaty or registered Indians. We indirectly obtain information on the non-status population of Indians when they say they are North American Indians but not registered.

Ms. Jean Crowder: On this kind of information around housing, could you extrapolate that for status?

Ms. Marie Patry: We could.

Ms. Jean Crowder: The reason I'm asking is that the federal government says its primary focus is on status. Part of the challenge with that is that there's a piece of legislation called Bill C-31 from 1985 that, if it plays out under section 6.2, will see a radical decline in status. I wonder if you've considered that in the context of self-identification.

There are two different mechanisms for funding, if you see where I'm going. It's my understanding that self-identification doesn't drive the funding process; it's status that drives the funding process.

Have you done any analysis on whether Bill C-31 is going to impact on status?

Ms. Marie Patry: We haven't done any analysis on that.

Ms. Jean Crowder: On the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, I notice on page 12—and I don't know if this is specifically around the Aboriginal Peoples Survey—there's a note that says it excludes 30 non-participating reserves in the 2001 census.

I guess there are two questions. Do you have any sense of how many people potentially will not participate in the census who could self-identify? Second, what percentage of aboriginal people participated in this survey? Do you have any estimates on that?

Ms. Marie Patry: We have an estimate of how many people from the reserves who refused to participate in the census, but my memory is failing me right now. I don't remember the number offhand, but we could provide it to you. We have an estimate of the number of missed people.

Concerning the number of people in the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, because we covered the population on-reserve as well outside the reserve, the sample in 2001 was around 120,000 aboriginal people.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Were they the ones who self-identified?

Ms. Marie Patry: We surveyed the population that reported only aboriginal ancestry, as well as the population that reported identifying. But the sample for what we call the ancestry-only population was much smaller.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Is there a margin of error on that?

Ms. Marie Patry: All our surveys provide margins of error.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So we could get that one if we needed it.

Will you provide us with the census completion rates?

Ms. Marie Patry: Yes, I will provide you with the number of missed people.

Ms. Jean Crowder: As to the note on page 12 where it says it excludes 30 non-participating reserves in the 2001 census, was it just on that particular question?

Ms. Marie Patry: I'm sorry, I missed the question.

Ms. Jean Crowder: On the top of page 12, it says: "Note: Excludes 30 non-participating reserves in the 2001 Census".

• (1140)

Ms. Marie Patry: All the data that talks about reserves excludes the 30 missed reserves.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Were they missed because they elected not to participate? Okay.

You know there are at least 30 that elected not to participate, but then it's the participation rates of those living on-reserve who did.

What mechanism did you use? Was it door-to-door on reserve?

Ms. Marie Patry: Yes, it was door-to-door.

Ms. Jean Crowder: On the number of people on-reserve, your estimate is 30% of aboriginal people. On page 5, it says that three in ten aboriginal people live on-reserve. But again, that's of the self-identified group; it's not status versus non-status.

Ms. Marie Patry: Yes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Do you have the numbers of status versus non-status on-reserve? Can you identify status versus non-status on-reserve?

Ms. Marie Patry: Yes, we can. As I explained earlier, you use people who said that first they were North American Indian, which is the terminology we use.

Ms. Jean Crowder: You talk about registered versus non-registered, but can you actually give us the numbers of non-status people on-reserve?

Ms. Marie Patry: Yes, we can.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Could you supply that? I wouldn't mind seeing the non-status people on-reserve, because it's a funding formula issue.

That's it for me.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the government side, we have Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will split my time with Mr. Albrecht.

Thank you very much for your presentation.

I wanted to get a little more detail on some of the data that was collected, in particular in relation to overcrowded dwellings. I see your note on the bottom of the graph on page 8, stating that overcrowding equals one or more persons per room. Is that per bedroom or per room in house?

Ms. Marie Patry: It's per room in the house, excluding bathrooms.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Excluding bathrooms? Okay. So a family of four children and two parents that has less than six rooms would be considered overcrowded?

Ms. Marie Patry: Yes.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Regarding the Métis population in urban centres that is built into that data, are you accounting for the number of two families living in the home, for instance? If more than two families are renting a home together, is this included in your statistics? Would that still be considered one family?

Ms. Marie Patry: Actually no, it would be considered two families.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Two families?

Ms. Marie Patry: Two families. But when we establish the overcrowding numbers, we count people. It doesn't matter if there are one, two, or three families sometimes; it's the number of people over the number of rooms.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Moving on to "One in five Aboriginal dwellings need major repairs" on page 11, I'm looking at the Manitoba statistic. This is from 2001, when I remember buying a home, and I'm Métis from Manitoba. I assume that the home I bought, which needed major repairs, is in theory captured in that number.

Ms. Marie Patry: Yes, it would be.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): You're a statistic.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Maybe it would be more relevant to ask if someone is actually living with those major repairs on a yearly basis, instead of just purchasing a home that needs major repairs. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?

Ms. Marie Patry: I'm not sure. Can you provide more information?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: For instance, when I bought a home in 2001, it needed major repairs. But I fixed up the home and did the major repairs, and then it no longer needed major repairs.

What I'm saying is that I know there are a lot of Métis people out there who fix up homes that need major repairs and resell them. Maybe they are not a good example of the statistic in that number. What you're looking for are people who live in homes with major repairs and don't fix them.

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: Yes. The census asks the respondents at the time that they are filling out the questionnaire, what is the status or the condition of their home? Does it require major repairs or not? That's at one point in time.

● (1145)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Okay. I will pass it along to Mr. Albrecht.

The Chair: Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To follow up on Ms. Crowder's question regarding the non-participating reserves, the reasons then would be that the band council or band leadership would decide that the entire reserve would not be included. So there are potentially a number of Canadians who are being excluded from the actual data that we have here today.

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: Yes. When the band council indicates to Statistics Canada that they, in the reserve, do not want to participate, we do not collect information from those communities.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Could we identify whether these are larger reserves? What kinds of numbers are we talking about? If you have 30 reserves, that could be as many as...how many thousands? Or it could be as few as a few hundred, I assume. Do we have a handle on that?

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: We can provide you with those numbers.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I'm just trying to get at the point of reliability of our data. With that number of reserves, it may not be significant at all, if they're very small. Yet it could be something that would impact our final analysis.

Another question that I'm not sure there's any answer for is, do the people who are identifying the quality of their residence and the need for major repairs self-identify that as well? What constitutes a major repair? I know some of the things I would identify, but—

Ms. Marie Patry: It's self-perception, and there are three possible categories. You have the choice, as well, of identifying minor repairs.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: There aren't examples given?

Ms. Marie Patry: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Good morning.

Along the same lines, I am a bit surprised to learn that aboriginal home owners need to make more repairs than renters. This goes against the logic that when one becomes a home owner, the dwelling is better looked after. This also comes as a surprise to me, because when we develop housing policy, we lean towards making aboriginals responsible for housing. I would like to hear your comments on this subject.

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

[English]

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: That was my first question.

My second question is the following. When you drew up these population charts, you said that you included the three groups. Did you also take into account communities undergoing demographic growth and those in regression?

I would like to hear your thoughts on that.

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: With respect to repairs, we cannot give you the specifics in each one of the cases. We cannot give you the reason why home owners have to make more repairs. Aboriginals who own their houses have to make more repairs than others.

If I understood your second question correctly, you are inquiring on the growth of different aboriginal groups, specifically the Inuit, the Metis and Indians. According to our hypotheses, there have been differences in the past regarding the growth of these groups. For example, there are differences in fertility rates. The fertility rate of the Metis population, for example, is lower than other populations.

Mr. Steven Blaney: I have a more specific question to ask. Did you take into account the regional profile of the Indian population? For example, the Indian population in Quebec appears to be stable, or decreasing, whereas the numbers are increasing in the west. Do you have your model?

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: Yes, indeed. Our projections do take into consideration the regional situation. They not only take into consideration the provincial situation, but also the situation within the provinces themselves. We take into account populations living on and off reserves.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Are those data available?

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: Yes, we have this information.

Mr. Steven Blaney: It would be interesting to have a regional breakdown of aboriginal community growth. That would be of interest to me.

That is what I suggest, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: The chair would like to ask a question.

As concerns the comparative age demographics, when you talk about aboriginal and non-aboriginal with regard to crowding, you make the statement in your report that the aboriginal population is a younger population, whereas the non-aboriginal population is an older population.

There are many baby boomers who, like my wife and I, live in a three-bedroom home, just the two of us, whereas if we were a younger demographic population, as far as non-aboriginal is concerned, we might tend to have more children in a smaller home. Did you take that into consideration when you compared non-aboriginal and aboriginal overcrowding?

• (1150)

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: The definition of overcrowding we are using is one that is applied and standardized across all populations, but you certainly have a good point. With a younger population, you do have larger families and you do have larger household sizes; thus, you would have a larger proportion of population per household.

The Chair: I mention it because under your definition, my children would be in that situation of overcrowding.

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: For sure. This is one indicator. This is one of many statistics we provide to various policy analysts. They take into account many factors, including the overcrowding factor, but include as well family size, household size, and age distributions of the region. All of these are taken together, as well as other statistics, in determining the situation with regard to a particular area or a particular group.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have about 10 more minutes. Are there any further questions from the Liberal side?

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

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Good morning, and thank you for the presentation.

I remember great debates over the ancestry question as opposed to the identity question, which changed in 2001 or something of that nature, I believe, in terms of the surveys that were being conducted and the census data that were being collected.

My question is not so much for you guys. I think there's only one indicator, from your presentation, of an area in which the aboriginal population might be better off than the non-aboriginal population in terms of housing. Other than that, almost every indicator would say we're worse off in the aboriginal communities, and it doesn't matter where we live—in the Arctic, in small rural areas, or in metropolitan areas. The word “crisis” comes to mind, although there may have been some marginal improvement in some areas.

Mr. Chair, has this been directed to the parliamentary secretary? I don't know if that's appropriate or not. We had a lot of housing money announced—hundreds of millions of dollars, apparently, in housing money. Can we get an update? Where is that? Has it been disbursed to the provinces? There were supposed to be trusts, but now I understand no trusts are being set up and what was announced has gone to the provinces and is being disbursed through the existing housing regimes already in place.

Can we get that answered for the committee?

The Chair: You can ask that question. I think we're dealing with statistics right now. If you want to talk about statistics, I would suggest that question would be more appropriate at this time.

Mr. Todd Russell: Can you guys answer that?

I'm sure the answer is probably no. I appreciate where you're coming from.

The Chair: You'll have that opportunity on February 13, when we have the department here.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thanks for that. I thank you for the information. It's quite useful.

The Chair: First, on the government side, are there any questions?

Go ahead, Mr. Merasty.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Although some first nations communities have been excluded and there are challenges to the data, from what I hear the bottom line is that there is a housing shortage and there is significant demand for major repairs. Significant investment would be the natural assumption from reading these statistics. Is that true? Is that what you see as well?

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: With regard to the reserves that have been excluded, the percentage of the overall population of the North American Indian identity population that has been excluded is relatively small. When we are looking at the tendencies and trends for the aboriginal population, while these exclusions are important for certain regions of the country and do have to be taken into account when looking at these data, overall the information that we have on the aboriginal identity population—

Mr. Gary Merasty: Is it a crisis?

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: Do you mean now, with regard to the housing? We are able to provide you with the conditions of housing—the extent of the overcrowding, the extent of the housing that needs major repairs, the extent of the housing reported to have water contamination, and how this varies and can be compared within aboriginal groups and with the non-aboriginal population. We can also tell you how this changes over time.

•(1155)

Mr. Gary Merasty: So you give us the stats and then come to us

Mrs. Rosemary Bender: We can give you the stats; we let you answer the questions.

Mr. Gary Merasty: I declare it a crisis then. Can I have a motion to that effect?

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll hear just a final question from the government side, and then we're out of time.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Perhaps I can just get you to go back to what you indicated in relation to water contamination. On page 14, you asked the question—and I think this is based on their perception—as to whether or not water is contaminated. Just looking at the 16% of people within urban centres who feel their water is contaminated, do you have any thoughts as to that statistic? Clearly, it's 16% of people who claim to be aboriginal and who are living in urban areas. I don't recall our cities across Canada having water

crises as much as this number would indicate. Do you have a sense of why that number might be 16%?

Ms. Marie Patry: The key here is self-perception. If people perceive that their water is contaminated, that's what they will report. The only thing that comes to mind is people buying water from water-supplying companies because they think the water from their municipal system is not safe. It's quite large, so I would say that comes into it to explain the situation there. It's self-perception.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: In terms of your overall numbers on aboriginal population, I'm just going back to what Jean was mentioning earlier on the topic of what the government, in the past, has been responsible for, that being status Indian housing. When we build the Métis population into any number we're utilizing, I would suggest that the number becomes overinflated, as the Métis people provide housing for themselves. I guess it becomes a situation in which I'm not sure—at least from the department's point of view—that the number is of the same use as it can be when it just represents the status Indian.

Ms. Marie Patry: When you're doing the analysis, you have the choice to remove the Métis, should you wish to exclude the Métis from your analysis. But the data are provided from all the aboriginal people. All the questions are asked to everybody. When you're using the data in your analysis, it's more a matter of deciding to exclude, or not, parts of the population.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: But don't you think it could get lost on anyone taking a glance at the data that in fact there is this criterion that is quite different in relation to those specific groups?

Ms. Marie Patry: I'll defer to the policy department to decide where they go with that, but the data is available and you have a choice to use it or not in your analysis and research.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Thanks.

The Chair: Actually, we're out of time. I'm going to thank the witnesses for the information provided to the committee. Thank you very much.

Mr. Lévesque.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Thank you.

At our last meeting, I made a request that some food be provided for us at noon. To my mind, the request applied for all meetings during which we continue our deliberations over the lunch hour. Generally speaking, we have activities immediately before and after our committee meetings, and therefore, we do not have enough time to eat. Consequently, I wish to reiterate my request.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lévesque, the policy with regard to lunches during committee meetings is going to be distributed. That will be provided to you.

We're not permitted to have a scheduled lunch even if the committee meetings are during the lunch hour. You can do it on an individual basis at the meeting if it is requested by a member, but we cannot schedule a lunch for every committee meeting.

I would ask the clerk for further clarification.

● (1200)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Bonnie Charron): Just to add to that, we have a float of \$5,000. It's not intended for working meals, it's intended as a float to cover unforeseen expenses. When I tried to make arrangements for the meals, they said we couldn't do it unless we wanted to go ahead and deplete those funds and use them for working meals. That would require a motion in committee.

I was told it contravenes the spirit of the financial management policy. Again, it's up to the committee if we deplete the \$5,000, but we may need it for something else in the future.

The Chair: I'll give you a couple of minutes to think about that.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: It has all been thought out, Mr. Chair. As reasonable beings, we could have decided to sit at reasonable hours, taking into account the fact that like all other citizens, we need food.

[The meeting continues in camera]

[English]

● _____ (Pause) _____
●

[Public proceedings resume]

● (1240)

The Chair: Now, it's moved by Mr. Albrecht that the draft report as amended be adopted and that the chair present the report to the House, and that the chair, clerk, and analyst be authorized to make such grammatical and editorial changes as deemed necessary without changing the substance of the report.

Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I second the motion.

[English]

The Chair: All in favour?

I didn't include the words, "Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report." I think that's understood.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I would include that.

The Chair: You would? Okay.

Would you include that in your motion, Mr. Albrecht? Okay, so be it.

There is no group of our party that wants to have a dissenting opinion on this thing? I don't think so. Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We're going to have the distribution of the report from the subcommittee. Can I have a motion to move back in camera for this?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Let's go back to in camera!

[English]

The Chair: Is there a motion by any of the members to move back in camera? Not willing? You want to stay in public? Okay, we'll deal with this in public.

Does everyone have a copy?

There are two recommendations that have come forward from the subcommittee. The first one is that the study on housing consist of the plan and the briefings by department officials, and that the briefings take the form of a status report focusing on progress made to date and relevant future plans.

Just to expand a little bit on that recommendation, the subcommittee feels that there is sufficient information with regard to housing, much of which was included in the briefing that was circulated on aboriginal housing. The committee decided that it would be best to hear what the department's progress on housing is, and then possibly have another witness, but not to begin a full study on housing.

Do any committee members want to comment on that?

Madame Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

My recollection is that with the variety of studies that have already been completed and the recommendations that have already been made, what the subcommittee felt very strongly was that it would be important to have a progress report that talked about where the current money is going, what the results were for it, and what the status is on some of the recommendations that have been made through CMHC and the Auditor General. I think we also had agreed that we would like to hear from INAC, CMHC, and probably Health Canada because of the mouldy housing situation. That will conclude it, but we wanted to be really clear about results.

The Chair: We're not signing a report; we're looking for information from witnesses, correct?

Madame Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I agree, and Ms. Crowder summed it up, as did you.

What I would like to keep open the option on, Mr. Chair, is that after we hear the officials we may want to draft a report to the House recommending that certain action be taken based on the information we have from Ms. Hurley and what we hear.

● (1245)

The Chair: What I'm hearing is that you want to have the option of drafting a report or just forwarding a resolution.

Hon. Anita Neville: That's right.

The Chair: Okay, so then we're not closing the door for that.

Madam Karetak-Lindell.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: I want to add that I feel very strongly about looking at the status of the recommendations, because I also want the public there to know that just because the report has been done it's not just sitting on a shelf, that we do try to follow up to see where it's gone, so that we actually go back, look at the recommendations, and are able to report, saying there has been movement on these recommendations.

The Chair: What the committee did do was instruct the clerk to make sure the department was aware of the information we wanted. It's basically a status report on the past recommendations.

Is there anything from the government side on this?

Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Since our good parliamentary secretary has been absent in recent days for family reasons, rumours according to which the minister would be tabling the housing bill have been circulating on Parliament Hill. I would like to know whether the government can validate or invalidate these rumours. Are we mistaken, or are these rumours well-founded? In fact, there is no point in beginning a study or following up on certain issues if draft legislation is currently being prepared by the department and is expected to be tabled in the upcoming days or weeks.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Bruinooge, do you have an answer for Mr. Lemay?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Lemay, all I can report, of course, is just the statement that the minister has made previously in relation to matrimonial property and that now consultations are ongoing. That is of course in relation to housing on-reserve. It's his hope to have those consultations completed sooner rather than later. I imagine there will be legislation coming, but I don't think it's as imminent as perhaps any rumour that you've heard would suggest.

The Chair: Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Chair, obviously, as a committee, we expect our witnesses to be prepared to answer our questions, so that we can determine what has become of the recommendations. In fact, the document Ms. Hurley has prepared is very clear, and the witnesses can only expect that we have questions to ask.

I am going over the list of witnesses for the meeting of February 13. Through the parliamentary secretary, I wish to advise the department that I do not want their delegates to appear before us and tell us that they are studying the recommendations. These recommendations were tabled a year and a half ago, and something must be done. Let me restate that in even clearer terms: We expect some very specific recommendations for the next budget. We are not asking for budget secrets to be disclosed, but we want to know whether or not specific recommendations were set out by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development pertaining to housing, mold, and overcrowding in aboriginal and Inuit dwellings, in accordance with our recommendations.

We expect officials to provide us with answers on these issues at the next meeting on February 13.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemay. The parliamentary secretary could take that under advisement and advise his minister.

Moving on to the next item, it was that the committee undertake a study on child welfare. Recent media focus is on this issue of whether or not aboriginal children have the same financial support as non-aboriginal children when it comes to child welfare. We did have a submission as a committee, if you recall, by Cindy Blackstock. There was a report that she submitted. That was forwarded to the minister, and this committee asked for a response on that.

The subcommittee thought that might be an area the committee would be interested in taking on as a study, to see how factual the information that was provided was and, as far as policy is concerned, what is the best way to meet the needs of aboriginal children who are in the custody of social services.

Mr. Bruinooge.

• (1250)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: I just want to go back to our undertaking in the fall where, as a committee, we laid out topics that we wanted to pursue. Of course, the first one was post-secondary education, and I know housing was near the top as well. There were some other priorities on that list, such as governance and things of that nature. So that would be my question, that perhaps the list that was originally considered be looked at again for the next topics that we pursue.

The Chair: Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I take Mr. Bruinooge's point, but we know that things change, and given the current information concerning filing a complaint around the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the potential for a follow-up lawsuit, it would seem timely for us to take a look at child welfare, since there's an immediacy around it. I just think it would be a good thing for the committee to do at this point in time.

The Chair: Is there anything further?

Madam Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: As you know, Mr. Chair, I was part of the discussions. I share Ms. Crowder's concerns. I think child welfare has been part of the agenda. I certainly had a briefing on it last year. It's complicated. It's now very much part of the public discussion, and I think the immediacy of it really compels us to look at it and to come forward with some solutions.

The Chair: Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I believe that children's well-being is an ongoing concern. I agree with the proposal that we are considering. In fact, we discussed this on Monday. However, when we do begin the study, we will have to take into consideration federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions. Mr. Chair, we are going to have to decide how we will deal with this specific issue.

I see in the fourth report of the subcommittee, that there is a point which has already been studied. We had agreed to point out to the committee of the whole that we wish to obtain an update on the situation, to avoid redoing work that has already been done. For example—I thought this would be included but I don't see it—I suggested that we be given a briefing on the Kacheshewan situation every six weeks. What is happening in Pekangikum?

I wish to address the government party directly. We do not want to start all over again every month. I request that the department forward information to us so that we do not have to request it every six weeks. However, if this requires a motion, I will table one immediately even if it is only in French, and it can be translated into English later. In any case, regardless, we have to be given regular updates on the issues before this committee.

Allow me to give a very specific example. The government asked the opposition parties to make bill C-34, concerning education in British Columbia, a priority, and to deal with it quickly. We, that is myself and my counterparts from the other opposition parties, agreed to this request and passed the bill expeditiously in the month of December. We were waiting for the bill to be put to a vote in the House before adjournment in December. My leader asked me what happened and why bill C-34 was not tabled in the House for swift adoption, as was requested by the government. I would like an update on these matters.

• (1255)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Lemay, the purpose of the subcommittee was not to deal with that item. The chair would entertain the motion now, after we deal with this report from the subcommittee.

I know we discussed it; there wasn't a motion. That wasn't the purpose of the subcommittee meeting.

As I say, I'll entertain that after we deal with the report.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Chair, could I also please clarify, in relation to Bill C-34, that it did achieve royal assent due to the agreement of all parties? It didn't require a final vote.

I think that was your question.

The Chair: We're moving out of the subject of the subcommittee report. Now I'm going to be looking for a motion from the subcommittee to adopt the report.

Hon. Anita Neville: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: That was the final issue we dealt with at the subcommittee.

There were issues around the fact that when we do have witnesses dealing with a subject, the chair cannot move forward to ask for a response from the department or the minister, unless given direction. So what I suggest to the subcommittee is that if something comes from a witness about which committee members want to have information from the department or a response from the minister, you need to go on record with a motion, and then we can get an official response.

Madam Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, I would move that we ask the minister for a response to the report of the Cree-Naskapi Commission, based on their presentation to the committee.

Ms. Jean Crowder: We have a notice of motion coming forward on both the Cree-Naskapi—

Hon. Anita Neville: Okay, I'm sorry, Ms. Crowder.

The Chair: Yes, I should say that from our discussion, Madam Crowder has two motions. One is to look at the Cree-Naskapi, and the other one has to do with the correctional investigator—that we get a response from the minister on those two issues.

So we're not dealing with this now because there hasn't been sufficient notice for that motion. But it's being tabled now, and we'll deal with it on Thursday. Okay?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Chair, could I please suggest that since we're having witnesses on Thursday, we do my motion during the last 10 minutes of committee business.

The Chair: Okay, certainly.

We're just about out of time, so that's what we'll do. We'll adjourn for the next meeting, and we'll discuss your motion at that time.

This meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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