



House of Commons  
CANADA

# **Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development**

---

ENVI • NUMBER 002 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

---

**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, February 5, 2009**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. James Bezan**

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

**<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

# Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Thursday, February 5, 2009

● (0905)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order. Good morning, everyone. We're going to get into it right off the bat.

As we know, we have to finish off routine motions. We have only an hour this morning. We should try to get this wrapped up so we can get upstairs. The briefing documents are available in the committee room, and it gives us a chance to go through them before we actually have the briefing from the Auditor General and the environment commissioner.

Also, the environment commissioner is available to come back to the committee on Tuesday morning, so I'd suggest that we have him for an hour and then maybe do an hour of future business so that we can get our schedule lined up. Is everybody in agreement with that for Tuesday? Good.

When we left on Tuesday we were talking about reduced quorum, and I think we're back to the motion that was adopted by the committee at the 39th Parliament. Can I have somebody move a motion onto the floor to talk about reduced quorum?

Mr. Warawa.

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC):** Chair, I think we had a good, healthy discussion previously, and it was brought to our attention that reduced quorum was focused on the makeup of a majority government, where you have more members of the government on this side and you have to make sure that meetings cannot proceed without representation from the opposition members. The safety valve put in those routine motions is that the government can't hold meetings without a member of the opposition present, and that's what this clause is.

We find in a minority government that the opposite is true. In that case, a member of the government should be there. So would a motion be appropriate? We've already voted on changing it so that would say "the government". Would it be appropriate to reintroduce that motion at this meeting?

**The Chair:** No, it wouldn't, because we've already voted on that motion and it was defeated, and essentially we're still in the extension of the meeting that we were previously in. So I wouldn't accept that as being in order.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** As a question to you, Chair, am I correct in that logic, that this is why that's in there, to protect making sure we have an appropriate—

**The Chair:** Right. In most committees the chair is the government, and that's definitely the case in this situation. So the safety valve for the opposition is that they have at least one member present when there is a reduced quorum and witnesses being heard, and as we know, a reduced quorum cannot make any decisions either.

Monsieur Bigras.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** I would like to know exactly where we are and what we are discussing at the moment. Could you remind us? I understand that we are dealing with the reduced quorum, but I would like to know if we have a motion to speak to. Exactly what are we discussing at the moment?

[English]

**The Chair:** Well, there isn't a motion on the table right now. We were discussing the current motion, which is the one that was adopted at the 39th Parliament. That's the way we left the meeting last week. We had three amendments that were all defeated. So we're back to the main motion, and that's what we are talking about.

Monsieur Bigras.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** I would like to comment on this motion. As I said at the last committee meeting, this is the motion that allows us to show most respect for our witnesses. When the chair issues an invitation to a meeting on a specific matter, witnesses often have to travel a long way to testify. Out of respect for those witnesses, we have to be able to hold the meeting and hear them. We have to stop what I would call this meeting prevention system. The witnesses must be heard.

So I think that it is important to pass the motion as it was passed at the last meeting. It shows our witnesses that we are being transparent and that we respect them. When meetings are called by the chair, we have to be able to hold them.

I do not know what the official opposition thinks.

[English]

**The Chair:** Just on a matter of process here as well, because we are starting a meeting, we have to actually move this onto the floor. I need somebody to move the motion of reduced quorum onto the floor for discussion.

Can I have somebody move the motion of reduced quorum?

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I thought we had voted on it. Could you just give us a little recap?

**The Chair:** We voted on amendments.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** We hadn't voted on the main motion.

**The Chair:** Because we are starting a new meeting, we need to move it back onto the floor. I do need a mover for that motion.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** Maybe somebody could inform me. My understanding is that normally this would not be the way a committee would operate. This is something new, is it not? Is it not a sort of new twist on things?

I'm just trying to get some background. You've been a chair of a committee.

**The Chair:** Whenever a committee reconvenes a meeting, we should actually follow proper process. You should move the motions back onto the floor. I'm asking somebody to move—

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** No, I'm saying in terms of previous committees.

**The Chair:** Previous committees? Yes, this has been the norm in most committees. I understand, through the other committees that have met, that the reduced quorum, as has been proposed and circulated by the clerk, has been adopted at the majority of other committee organizational meetings.

• (0910)

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** Maybe Mr. Bigras or someone else who was at the committee could enlighten us or confirm this, but I recall the last time we had a situation when we had witnesses here and because, I think, if I'm not mistaken, there were no government members, the witnesses were basically held stranded.

Does the clerk remember something like this?

**The Chair:** Mr. Radford.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Normand Radford):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Scarpaleggia, it seems like it was a long time ago, but I seem to recall we had hearings that included people from Europe in a teleconference, and unfortunately a water valve broke in the city of Ottawa. All buildings had to be vacated. Therefore, the meeting had to be cancelled. I do remember that.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** I remember another situation where we actually had witnesses sitting here, but anyway, that's fine. Thank you for the information.

**The Chair:** Mr. Ouellet and then Mr. Warawa.

[Translation]

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Chair, if I understand correctly, we are discussing the principle, not a specific motion. I am just asking.

Mr. Warawa mentioned it earlier. I would like to discuss the principle too. I have some doubts about his reasoning that this clause protects the opposition. At the moment, with a government in the minority and the opposition in the majority, but divided, this clause protects the minority government more. Government members can up and decide not to attend a meeting and so prevent witnesses from being heard.

And you can see how divided we are; not all members were here previously, and not all are here now. On this side of the table, we are not united. This motion, which is quite usual and standard in all committees, serves precisely to maintain the opposition's lack of unity. Even in a minority, the government is protected by the fact that it feels, and is, united.

I am totally opposed to withdrawing the absolute need to have a representative from the opposition. That is the basic principle, in fact; we have to give the opposition an opportunity always to be present. We know that is not going to happen on the government side, even in a minority. It could be even more of a minority and it still would never happen. If government members decide to be here, they will all be here. If they decide not to be here, none will be here. We saw an example this morning.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Warawa and then Mr. Woodworth.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Do we have a motion on the floor now?

**The Chair:** Not technically.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** I'll move the motion.

**The Chair:** Okay. Which motion are you moving?

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** I'll move the motion before us about the chair being authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence. Basically I don't agree with what we have before us on the reduced quorum, but to get it on the table I will move it. I'll be voting against it.

I think the logic has already been explained numerous times. We are in a minority government. We have to make sure that the government is sitting at the table. On Tuesday we heard that what's good for the opposition...the government has no protection, and that's not fair. In the spirit of fairness this needs to be changed. We need to vote on it, so I will put it on the table for a vote.

**The Chair:** Mr. Woodworth.

[Translation]

**Mr. Christian Ouellet:** There is a motion on the table, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'll read the motion. This is the one that was circulated to all members under routine motions adopted by the committee of the 39th Parliament second session: "That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three (3) members are present, including one member of the opposition."

Mr. Woodworth.

• (0915)

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think the comments that were spoken a few moments ago really relate to the motion I proposed yesterday, which has already been defeated, to delete the final phrase of what we now have before us. Regrettably, from my point of view, my motion was defeated and that phrase was not deleted. From what I understand, it leaves us with a situation where, by reason of the office of chair, the chair has the ability to cancel a meeting, even with a reduced quorum. I can't figure any way around that, because the chair needs the discretion to do that. The chair seems to customarily be a government member in this committee.

On the other hand, we have the opposition, which by defeating my motion yesterday preserved their right to cancel a meeting by reason of a complete boycott. That seems to be the balance that the motion now on the floor creates. My feelings about it are the same as Mr. Warawa's.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there comments?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Next is dissenting or supplementary opinions. The one that was passed in the 39th Parliament was that any member of the committee be entitled to submit a dissenting or supplementary opinion to any committee report in accordance to the Standing Orders of the House and the conditions imposed by the committee.

Mr. Bigras.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** If I understand this motion correctly, any member of the committee will be able to write a dissenting opinion, which means that we could have more than one dissenting opinion per party. I think that perhaps a slight change is needed. We could have up to six dissenting opinions per committee report. I do not want to move an amendment; I would prefer to discuss whether it might perhaps be more logical to have one dissenting opinion per party rather than one per committee member. That is my position. Basically, this motion allows us to apply a rule that already exists. I am not opposed to the motion; I just want to bring to your attention the fact that it opens the door to a number of dissenting opinions when, as a principle, there should only be one dissenting opinion per political party. If the Bloc Québécois wants to file a dissenting opinion, no problem. But we do not want there to be six or seven dissenting opinions.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. McGuinty.

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** If this motion were to pass, would there be anything to stop an individual member of Parliament from submitting a dissenting or supplementary opinion?

**The Chair:** No, because the Standing Orders stipulate that we're here as members, not partisans. We have to respect the Standing Orders, which state that members of a committee can submit a dissenting report.

**Mr. David McGuinty:** I thought that was pretty well established, as I recall from the last Parliament or two Parliaments ago.

While you're at it, Mr. Chair, is there anything materially different here from the last Parliament? Or is this the same?

**The Chair:** It's the same as what you passed in the 39th. In my previous committee, the committee would have different conditions on various reports as they were filed. One rule of thumb was that a dissenting report could not be longer than the report itself, but those are conditions we would agree to at the time of the report being filed.

Are there any other questions?

Mr. Warawa and then Mr. Woodworth.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** I'll move the motion.

**The Chair:** Okay. So moved.

Mr. Woodworth.

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** I have just a very quick comment. I think the principle set out in the orders is the correct one: that we are here as individuals. Although we work under party discipline, to me that's still an important principle. We're here as individuals. We're not here simply representing a party. Otherwise we could have a committee composed of four members, or whatever number of parties there are now. I've lost track.

Thank you.

● (0920)

**The Chair:** Next is reports from committees, Standing Order 35 (2): "Upon presentation of a report accompanied by supplementary"—

**A voice:** No, that's not the same one.

**The Chair:** That's not the same one? But reports are filed by members of the committee, not by the parties, so that, I think, is the interpretation.

Do we have any other discussion?

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

**The Chair:** Concerning witnesses' expenses, the motion passed from the 39th Parliament states that, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation, and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses, not exceeding two representatives per organization; and that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the chair.

Mr. Warawa.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Chair, I accept this, but I would like to make a friendly amendment to add that teleconferencing facilities should be used whenever possible. It's the technology of today, and we need to reduce costs when we can.

**The Chair:** And the carbon footprint.

Mr. Braid.

**Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC):** I'd like to second that, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We don't need seconders at committee level, but you're moving it with an amendment?

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Any questions or comments?

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

**The Chair:** On distribution of documents, it states that the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute to the members of the committee only documents that are available in both official languages.

Can I get somebody to put it on the floor?

Monsieur Bigras.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** I so move.

**The Chair:** Mr. Warawa, do you have a comment?

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** I have one other friendly amendment: that the clerk be advised to advise all witnesses appearing before the committee of this requirement.

**An hon. member:** Yes.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** The documents often come to us in one official language and then we don't have access to them in a timely fashion. We can't read them ahead of time. I think it's a common practice, but we might as well put it down.

**Mr. David McGuinty:** On that question, Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** I have Ms. Duncan first, and then Mr. McGuinty.

Ms. Duncan.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** I have a question for clarification. When witnesses appear before committee, do we translate for them?

**The Chair:** Right, but if they have documents they want to circulate, they have to be in both official languages. It's one thing to have the interpretation coming from the booth as they make their presentations—

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** That's what I mean: the documents.

**The Chair:** —but the documents on the table have to be in both official languages.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Do they have to translate them or do they submit them and we will do it?

**The Chair:** No. If they put them in on in time, they'll get translated, but there has to be some lead time to get the work done.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I haven't seen the documents that are made available to people who testify before us. Are they given that information? Are they being informed that it can be translated?

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** That's the amendment.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. McGuinty.

**Mr. David McGuinty:** This really speaks to a concern I think a lot of us have about witnesses and their appearances. It's not only the need to make sure the documents or decks that are distributed, or presentations, are timely and provided to us in both official languages. I don't know to what extent this committee would wish to make it a condition precedent for appearance if you don't show up

here having given your documentation two or three days in advance so the clerk can get it translated into English or French. Furthermore, as Ms. Duncan was alluding to, for a lot of witnesses—having been on the other side, having appeared before being elected many times in standing committees as a witness—it's very difficult to know what's expected of you.

I don't know to what extent you get guidance. You're told you have seven minutes, and you have materials that will preferably be distributed in both languages. But that's not always very helpful, and I'm not sure it's always helpful to us in terms of what we're looking at—if it's the Species at Risk Act or another study, whatever the subject matter.

I just want to deposit this here for everybody's consideration. I'm not sure if it's linked exactly to this distribution of documents question, but I think it's opened the door. What do we ask these witnesses to do? To what extent are we clear about our expectations of them if we're bringing them in by teleconference, or if they're coming in? When someone comes in from an organization and spends three or five minutes out of seven telling us about their organization, I guess that's important, but if it's three or four minutes from a seven-minute talk that ought to be dedicated to the merits of the issues we're looking at, that's another question.

From my experience, a lot of witnesses don't know what's expected of them. They're called, they show up, they're not briefed. They don't necessarily receive information in advance. I don't want to make it too onerous here, but it would certainly make it more productive for us.

● (0925)

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Good point.

**The Chair:** I have Monsieur Bigras and then Mr. Woodworth.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** I find it a little ironic to talk about simplifying things at a time when Francophones need access to documents. Documents presented by witnesses are all relevant and people must have access to them in the language of their choice. That seems fundamental to me, and questions of procedure do not enter into it.

The committee must observe the Official Languages Act. I do not see why we are here debating what is relevant and what is not. This is not complicated: documents must be provided in both official languages, and witnesses must be told that in advance.

It has never caused me any problem on the committee. I have sometimes agreed to documents being distributed in English only. I do not want a long debate about this. The clerk must advise witnesses that documents must be provided in both official languages.

I want to make sure that the rule and the act are followed. It is my right to get documents in French so that I can understand the debate.

[English]

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** We're trying to facilitate that.

Mr. Woodworth.

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** I ask this because I'm new here, but would it be in order for us to give directions to the clerk to put his mind to Mr. McGuinty's comments? Perhaps the clerk could prepare appropriate instruction or guidance for witnesses and simply distribute it to us so that new members such as me know what the expectations of witnesses are when they arrive. Could we ask for that?

**The Chair:** I take it upon myself as chair of this committee to work with the clerk to ensure we respect the Official Languages Act and move forward with appropriate documentation to be presented to witnesses in advance of their appearance.

Mr. Wilfert. Welcome to the environment committee.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** As a former parliamentary secretary, it's nice to be back.

I think it would be helpful if all clerks were instructed to provide a written outline as to expectations. People come with documents. They start reading them and sometimes don't finish. So it's important they know that the documents have been distributed in advance to members, so they can go through and select the key elements and make it germane to whatever topic is being presented. They either run overtime, or don't really understand what their role is. It's incumbent upon members to have read the documentation as well.

But if there were standard written guidelines, which we're certainly looking to have, it would be helpful for both the presenters and the members.

**The Chair:** Mr. Radford.

**The Clerk:** Just very briefly, Mr. Chair, perhaps I can answer some of those questions.

There is a standard guideline, prepared by the House, that is given to witnesses. I have a copy I could send to you. In terms of this committee, what we've normally done, Tim and I... Certainly I send letters to the witnesses and phone them. We identify the themes of what we're doing, so the broad questions. If available, I always send the previous blues, the evidence. I normally establish a working dialogue with them to ensure that the presentation is focused on those areas.

In some instances witnesses will do what witnesses do: they see this as an opportunity and they have their own agenda. That happens. But that's all we can do.

• (0930)

**The Chair:** And there will be circumstances where witnesses will not provide documentation. They will just appear here and speak. We know from experience in other committees, this one included, that witnesses will show up just to do a verbal presentation.

Mr. Warawa.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think the motion before us covers it adequately. However, the points brought by Mr. McGuinty and Mr. Wilfert are good. Anyone who has ever been on this committee has found it very frustrating to hear witnesses without having their briefing materials ahead of time in order for us to be prepared.

I think the point that Mr. McGuinty is making.... Well, I think he's suggesting that maybe we should consider taking it to a higher level. If they're going to be witnesses, they have to provide the materials to the clerk in a timely fashion so that we can be prepared. In that way we'd be much more productive as a committee.

So I think it's a good point: do we take it to that higher level? What is the traditional thing that happens here? Well over 50% of the time we do not get materials. Should we take it to the higher level? Maybe. It is a very good point. The message would get out to the witnesses very clearly: if you're going to be at the environment committee, it's a serious committee, and you need to provide those briefing materials.

I would like to take it to that next level.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Bigras.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** I certainly understand the comments that Mr. McGuinty, Mr. Wilfert and Mr. Warawa are making, but that is not what the motion before us is saying. It is saying that when the clerk receives documents, they have to be distributed in both official languages. Of course, you are right, the documents must be distributed before the committee meets, so that we can go over them. What we have to avoid is documents that have not been translated being distributed to committee members.

It would be totally unacceptable if a witness from Quebec were to send the clerk a report in French and it was distributed to committee members in French only. I feel sure that there would be a reaction to that around the table. We would say that it is unacceptable, that it contravenes the Official Languages Act, that the document must be translated into English, and we would be right.

Under the Official Languages Act, I am also entitled to receive a version of documents sent to the clerk in my native language. That is how things are.

That is what this motion is about. It is not about the importance of distributing documents to committee members before meetings so that we can go over them.

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Duncan, and then Mr. Scarpaleggia.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I'm going to make a brief comment—reluctantly, simply because I'd hoped that we could get through these rules much more quickly—and say that we seem to be getting into discussing things that aren't even in this rule. I would tend to say let's call the question and move on. Then we can have consensus that there are additional things that we will agree to.

One thing I would like to have clear is that we're talking about documents that are filed in advance, but if a witness raises a document, some kind of report they authored and so forth, that sounds of interest to us, I would hope that wouldn't preclude the witness, if we requested it, from providing it. Then we would have it translated and everybody could review it when we considered—

**The Chair:** The general practice here, at least from my experience, is that if a witness does appear with material in one of the official languages, it can be filed with the clerk and then translated and distributed at a later time. That's unless the committee agrees to have it distributed at the committee, but there has to be unanimous consent to do that.

Mr. Scarpaleggia.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** I'm in agreement that we should call the question.

Perhaps we could ask the clerk to come back to us with the written procedure he follows—it has nothing to do with official languages, that's another question—in terms of informing witnesses about what they need to do.

**The Chair:** Just for your information, once we get through all these routine motions, we'll have them printed and circulated to all committee members, and with that we'll include what the process is for informing witnesses about their testimony.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** Perfect. I would call the question.

**The Chair:** Any other comments? Seeing none, all those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

● (0935)

**The Chair:** Continuing on, staff at in camera meetings: that unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff person and, in addition, each party be permitted to have one staff member from the office of either their House leader, their whip, or their research bureau attend in camera meetings.

That was passed at the 39th parliament, second session.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I move it.

**The Chair:** Moved by Ms. Duncan.

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC):** Everybody else is abstaining.

**The Chair:** Any comments, discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Working meals: that the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I move that.

**The Chair:** Moved by Ms. Duncan.

Discussion?

Mr. Warawa.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** I'm assuming this would be in consultation with the chair.

**The Chair:** Of course.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bigras.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** We are often accompanied by staff members, and they do not get the meals. I say this because, you can often hear our assistants making choice comments about members, and how members get the meals and assistants do not. We allow our staff to attend meetings, even in camera meetings, because we consider them important. So we should show them some flexibility when we pass this rule.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, quantity and quality. Any other comments?

I call the question.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** We also had a motion for gifts: that the chair be authorized to purchase gifts on behalf of the committee for visiting delegations to Canada meeting with the committee or for foreign hosts when the committee is travelling abroad.

I don't know how frequently this happens, but you had this as a motion in the past.

Mr. Watson.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** I'll move the motion then.

**The Chair:** Discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Purchasing documents: that the committee be authorized to purchase documents for the use of the committee.

Mr. Braid.

**Mr. Peter Braid:** I'll move that.

**The Chair:** Comments?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Are there any other motions?

**Mr. David McGuinty:** Chair, may I ask a question?

**The Chair:** Question, Mr. McGuinty.

**Mr. David McGuinty:** For everyone's full disclosure, can you remind us what the budget of this committee is and what staffing there is? We have a clerk who is with us. I don't know if this clerk is assigned to this committee full-time or is assigned to other committees. We have a researcher or two. I don't know if they are full-time associated with this committee or not. I ask for everyone's benefit.

**The Chair:** As you know, we do have two analysts assigned to us through the Library of Parliament, paid for by the Library of Parliament. There has been a restructuring within the library, and so there are actually silos of several committees under one senior researcher. So Jean-Denis Fréchette is our head analyst. He's overseeing all the research of several committees, and then we have Tim and Penny assigned to us.

You're not doing work for other committees, are you?



**Mr. Tim Williams (Committee Researcher):** Not at this particular point in time, but what's envisioned is that depending on the subject matter committees take up, we will supply the analysts who have the appropriate expertise for the subject matter. I've been with this committee now for eight years and I don't really imagine going to another one, but that doesn't mean I wouldn't be assigned to another one at the same time.

On top of that, it's also worth mentioning, I think, that we are not simply assigned to...our one job is not to supply committees with help, but it's also to answer members' questions from both houses, and we also help out on interparliamentary associations. So while we are assigned to this committee, we have a number of other jobs.

• (0940)

**The Chair:** And I know that in agriculture our researchers also work on a Senate committee as well. Do you guys do some work for the Senate?

**Mr. Tim Williams:** From time to time, yes.

**The Chair:** Mr. McGuinty.

**Mr. David McGuinty:** How much time do you have available to dedicate to this committee, if you look at the jobbing you do?

**Mr. Tim Williams:** Statistically speaking, I think analysts spend approximately 70% of their time working for committee.

**Mr. David McGuinty:** That's two analysts per committee?

**Mr. Tim Williams:** No. This is a lucky committee, having two analysts assigned to it. Most of them do not have a full two analysts.

**Mr. David McGuinty:** So roughly 70% of two person-years right now is dedicated to this committee. Is that right, Penny?

**Ms. Penny Becklumb (Committee Researcher):** I provide some support for citizenship and immigration, and I do legislation as well. I have to summarize legislation, and so I'll follow that through whichever committees it goes through, the House, and the Senate.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bigras.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** I have a question about planning our work. What is going to happen next week? We have a session on Tuesday, but do we intend to form a subcommittee to consider our future work? What is the schedule for next week?

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, so I'm suggesting that on Tuesday morning we'll have the environment commissioner back and we'll be able to continue with our questioning from the briefing we're going to receive today and the report he's tabling at two o'clock.

Then we would go in camera, and we can do it as a whole committee rather than just as the steering committee, and start laying out our agenda and calling witnesses.

Okay.

**Mr. David McGuinty:** What is the budget of this committee? Just quickly, is there an assigned budget to standing committees of the House of Commons?

**The Chair:** Mr. Radford.

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

The budget goes by studies, so if we're going to undertake a major study, for example, if it involves travelling or many witnesses or a teleconference, then I would prepare a budget, which would have to be approved by this committee, along with a work plan.

**The Chair:** And then we have to present that to the Liaison Committee, which is all the chairs of all the committees, and they have to approve it too or modify it, and that happens frequently.

Monsieur Bigras.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Perhaps I am wrong, but there are some things I do not understand.

I would like to come back to the question I asked earlier. You tell us that we are going to plan our work, but no committee meeting has been called. To my knowledge, today's meeting is the only formal one that has been called. We are going to hear the Environment Commissioner, and a plenary meeting is open to all members. Do you mean that we are going to plan the committee's future work at some stage in a committee meeting that has not been called?

[English]

**The Chair:** No, no, I'm talking—

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** I do not understand. Usually, there are motions allowing the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure to meet. I see no notice of any meeting other than the one I have before me.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, we haven't called next week yet. There will be a notice today.

The environment commissioner told me last night that he's available to meet with us on Tuesday for an hour. Tuesday is our scheduled slotted time, so from 9 till 10 o'clock we'll ask the environment commissioner to appear before committee so that we, as a committee, have time to ask him questions based on the report he's about to table, and that, if we shoot upstairs, we'll be able to get briefed on.

And if you want to do it as a steering committee, as a subcommittee, we can do that from 10 to 11 o'clock. Or we can do it as a whole committee. I'm open to discussion on that one. But since everybody's going to be here from 9 to 10 o'clock, I'm okay with going with everybody from 10 to 11.

Francis.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** I would suggest that in the second hour we meet as a full committee and plan our future business.

**The Chair:** We'll plan our future business, and that way we can find out where everybody sits on various issues.

Ms. Duncan.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Mr. Chair, I have a question.

As I understand, next week may be our only opportunity to review the estimates. Should that not be our priority? Are the minister and his officials going to come before us next week?

**The Chair:** I'll defer that to the parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** If that is the wish of the committee, I can put in a request to the minister and officials.

● (0945)

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** That would be my priority, even over the commissioner.

**The Chair:** We're going to be considering supplementary estimates (B).

Are there any other comments? Discussion?

Mr. McGuinty.

**Mr. David McGuinty:** Very quickly, that's a really good point that Ms. Duncan raised. In the last several years we've often had difficulty fitting in the estimates process.

I'm wondering, Mr. Chair, if a motion is required, or whether the clerk could be asked to give our committee regular notice—maybe it's a month, maybe three weeks. At first blush, a month—four weeks—would seem helpful in the sense that we, as a committee, can plan on a regular basis.

I've always believed that the estimates process, under all the governments I've seen in the last 15 years, has underachieved. I think the role of committees, in large part, is to deal with line departments and ministers on how they spend their resources. I think that's what Canadians expect of us.

I'm glad you raised that, Ms. Duncan. It completely escaped my mind. I'm not sure if it was on the minds of other members.

I'm wondering if the clerk could give us at least a month's notice to say here are the drop-dead dates. We can start planning so that we know, the minister knows, and the parliamentary secretary knows, in fairness, that we have more time allocated for the estimates process.

I've heard from a lot of constituents who follow these things, who say, "Well, aren't you meeting for longer periods of time than an hour with a minister to deal with a billion-dollar budget?" It seems to me that the estimates process is more important than that.

**The Chair:** I want to draw everyone's attention to Standing Order 115(2). This is in relation to committees. It says: "During periods coinciding with the hours of the sitting of the House, priority shall be given to the meeting of committees considering legislation or Estimates over meetings of committees considering other matters." So it is our responsibility to consider legislation and estimates as our priority work. It's right in the Standing Orders. We should be diligent and prudent, and we should be calling government officials and the minister to go over those estimates.

I have Mr. Wilfert and then Mr. Bigras.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:** Mr. Chairman, I have an observation.

My understanding is that there was an agreement among the House leaders, particularly because the government wants to get these estimates through. For example, the minister will be appearing at the national defence committee on Monday. He will be returning from Germany on Sunday night, I guess, and he will be there. So it is a priority.

Not to tell this committee what to do, but I would suggest that the estimates definitely need to be dealt with, and not just for an hour.

The minister may only be there for an hour or whatever, but certainly his officials will be there.

Also, an issue I have is that those documentations should be made available well in advance to the members of the committee. Otherwise, how are the members of the committee going to review them if they are simply presented on the day of, which has often happened at some committees?

I understand the House leaders are all in agreement. They want to move this along. And I'm sure the parliamentary secretary will make sure that the minister is here.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Bigras.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Going by the comments of my colleagues Ms. Duncan and Mr. McGuinty, and by the Standing Order you have just read, I think that it is important for us to study the estimates as quickly as possible. I know that Mr. Warawa has just made a note of the committee's request, but perhaps it would be good if you...

I am going to wait until he is listening to me. No, I have not finished. I stopped so that you would listen to me.

[English]

**The Chair:** Sorry.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Perhaps it would be good if you sent the minister an invitation to appear before the committee on Thursday to present the estimates. You should send him a more formal invitation. Please understand that I am not making a motion. But you should send the minister an invitation to appear before the committee on Thursday, given that we will be studying the estimates. The committee would normally meet on February 5 at 9:00 a.m., would it not?

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Duncan.

● (0950)

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I know that ministers have very busy schedules, so I'd like to suggest that we make it a priority to welcome the minister either Tuesday or Thursday and to try to expedite getting the estimates to us by the end of today, if possible, or Monday morning at the latest.

**The Chair:** I'll ask the clerk, Mr. Radford, to get the supplementary estimates (B) to us. Those who are new to the committee may not have them. I know I don't. We will also circulate the schedule of how the different reports we're responsible for, including the estimates, are tabled in the House, so we have that schedule and we know when these things are coming down the pipe at us.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** For February 12.

[English]

**The Chair:** And I will take it upon myself, Monsieur Bigras, to talk to the minister.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** I said an invitation to the meeting on February 5, but actually, I meant an invitation to the meeting on February 12.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay. Are there any other comments? We should shoot upstairs.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** I move to adjourn.

**The Chair:** The meeting is now 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**

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:  
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

---

**The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.**

**Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.**