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• (1115)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.)): I will call the meeting to order.

Thank you, all, for coming today.

I will skip over the usual pleasantries and try to accelerate the process here, because we're running 15 minutes behind and we're tight for time. We have three 40-minute segments in this meeting, the third of which is the clause-by-clause, which we would like to complete today.

In the second segment, we have with us our minister, who is supposed to be joining us at 11:40 for 40 minutes.

Our first panel, of course, is here with us, consisting of the Newfoundland and Labrador Oil and Gas Industries Association and Charlene Johnson. We also have Unifor local 2121 and Mr. Dave Mercer.

Each of you is given up to five minutes to speak. You can speak in French and/or English. Translation is available, as we know by now.

I will jump right in.

Ms. Johnson, why don't you start us off for five minutes, please?

Ms. Charlene Johnson (Chief Executive Officer, Newfoundland and Labrador Oil and Gas Industries Association): Thank you so much, Chair and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee today.

My name is Charlene Johnson. I am the CEO of the Newfoundland and Labrador Oil and Gas Industries Association, more commonly known as Noia.

Our association represents member companies that are involved in the offshore oil and gas supply and service sector. Noia members are very diverse. They include those who operate supply vessels and helicopters, human resource agencies, safety and environmental companies and even those involved in the hospitality industry, which also receives numerous spinoffs from the offshore here.

I appear on behalf of those members to offer my comments on Bill S-3, an act to amend the Offshore Health and Safety Act.

This is my second time speaking with the natural resources parliamentary committee about this issue, and I certainly thank you for the opportunity. My remarks are reflective of my comments when I

presented to the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources back in February.

I would like to note that Noia was appreciative of the actions of the Senate and similarly appreciative of the Department of Natural Resources for acting quickly upon the Senate passing the bill and providing an opportunity for Noia to provide comments on new regulations. This is exactly the type of expediency we were hoping for, and I hope the legislation and regulations can be passed and enacted before the end of the calendar year.

Noia has spoken a lot, including to many federal officials, about competitiveness and timelines. As I appear before you, my message remains the same. The process to institute new Atlantic occupational health and safety initiative regulations for the offshore has taken far too long. It is another symptom of the disease of delay that has permeated our industry and hindered our growth.

Thankfully, in this current situation, the actions of those involved in the offshore, including offshore operators and the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board, coupled with the protections provided by the Atlantic Accord and the Accord Implementation Act, have ensured that safety has remained a priority in the offshore oil and gas industry.

The industry is already carrying on with performance-based standards and international best practices to ensure the safety of workers. While the regulatory process has taken long, we have comfort in action taken by all of those who participate in this industry and their commitment to safety. That has been, and I believe, will always remain paramount; however, we need to complete this process and similar processes more quickly.

To give a quick example of industry safety, which the offshore is a leader of in Newfoundland and Labrador, both Hibernia, the oldest facility, and Hebron, our newest facility, had loss-time injury rates of zero in 2018.

With that said, I would like to point out that the Nova Scotia Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Council was appointed in March 2019, and, to my understanding, has been meeting twice a year. The corresponding committee for offshore Newfoundland and Labrador is not yet established. In the best interest of everyone, this should be corrected as quickly as possible.

The international industry monitors the speed of our processes, and protracted delay influences their interest. Continual delay, inconsistent regulation and the ever changing and ever moving goal-posts impact decisions to participate and invest in the Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador offshore. We need to overcome these significant hurdles.

In that light, Noia is supportive of efforts to advance and complete this process, and supports Bill S-3, yet, while we need to get this done, it needs to be done right. We do not wish to see a protracted process, but we also do not wish to be back to this process again in short order. I believe the process undertaken by NRCan in the last two months can accomplish just that.

Additionally, we need to ensure that the occupational health and safety regulations we enact now avoid unnecessary duplication with other legislation. Most importantly, we must not lower any standard of health and safety in the offshore.

In essence and to conclude my remarks, Noia supports the completion of this process in a timely manner, one that includes a holistic approach to offshore regulations and considers the demonstrated commitment of the industry to ensure the safety of each and every individual who works offshore in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, and thank you again for your time.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will move on to Mr. Mercer.

I was remiss at the beginning in forgetting to welcome Mr. Harris.

Thank you for joining us today.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Mercer, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Dave Mercer (President, Unifor Local 2121): Thank you and good afternoon, honourable members of the Standing Committee.

My name is Dave Mercer. I'm president of Unifor local 2121 and a member of the Newfoundland and Labrador oil and gas industry recovery task force.

On behalf of Unifor members in the energy sector, I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources for inviting me again for the second time to comment on Bill S-3, an act to amend the Offshore Health and Safety Act

Unifor represents nearly 800 workers in the offshore oil sector, including members of local 2121 who work on the Hibernia and Terra Nova FPSO. Our members in the offshore industry know first-hand the importance of the sector to the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador and just how much of an impact the COVID-19 crisis has had on workers in this province.

Since the crisis began last spring, more than 400 of our members have been laid off from the oil industry. They are part of a group of thousands of workers who work directly in the offshore oil and gas

sector who have been laid off. There are possibly thousands of jobs in the industry and service supply sector that have been lost as well.

From the very start of this crisis, Unifor has tirelessly advocated for measures to kick-start the recovery of the offshore oil and gas industry while ensuring the return of decent, good-paying jobs to the province. The members of Unifor recognize the immense importance of the Offshore Health and Safety Act, which was introduced in 2014 to clarify a maze of offshore regulations, fill in gaps between federal and provincial jurisdictions and to provide offshore workers with the protections that are at least equal to those that exist for onshore workers.

We therefore agree with Senator David Wells—

I'm sorry, can you hear me? Something keeps coming up.

The Chair: We can hear you. We can't see you, though.

Mr. Dave Mercer: Okay.

We therefore agree with Senator David Wells that to allow the transitional regulations to lapse at the end of 2020 has been a dereliction of duty by the current federal government, which has had six years to develop and implement permanent regulations. This is particularly the case in light of the tragedies that offshore workers have experienced in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador due to the absence of sufficient health and safety regulations in the past.

All of you are probably familiar with the collective trauma experienced with our communities after disasters such as the Ocean Ranger and Cougar Flight 491 Well, today we're right back where we started. Our members in the offshore sector have worked within a regulatory void for over four months with no occupational health and safety regulations to protect them.

While we understand this is a complicated process to implement permanent regulations, the offshore industry has advanced far beyond where it was in 2014, and it is more important than ever to have updated regulations in place to protect our members. Six years is more than enough time. I'm glad to see that the Senate amended the bill to reflect the idea. This should be the final extension for the deadline, and permanent regulations should be in place by the end of the year. Unifor also supports the requirement that the Department of Natural Resources submit a progress report to the Senate by June 15 outlining a clear implementation schedule.

I urge Parliament to pass Bill S-3 as soon as possible so that the transitional regulations are revived, even if only until the end of the year while permanent regulations are being sorted out. Our members in the offshore industry work in a unique environment with significant safety challenges, and many workers had to lose their lives for the health and safety regulations to get to where they are today.

However, I'll also ask the government to do more to investigate how these regulations can be strengthened as part of the development of permanent regulations to ensure that companies cannot simply shirk their responsibility to conduct preventive maintenance and repairs by pausing operations as they have done during the COVID-19 crisis. In March, Unifor submitted detailed recommendations to strengthen these regulations as part of the stakeholder consultations. Unifor believes that solutions to health and safety issues are best resolved with full participation of workers' health and safety representatives of the joint health and safety committees in all workplace activities related to occupational health and safety. Workers have a right to know about hazards in the workplace. They have a right to fully participate in workplace health and safety, and of course, workers always have the right to refuse.

Because offshore work is so remote, workers are not always protected by the intersection of workplace occupational health and safety inspectors who may be hours or days away. The offshore workplace is one where the internal responsibility system, or IRS, must be strong. We believe that the amendments we are proposing to the regulation enhance the IRS by giving the workplace joint health and occupational...and the worker representatives more tools to work with helping employers solve sometimes very complex safety issues while protecting—

• (1125)

The Chair: Mr. Mercer, I'm going to have to ask you to wrap up if you can, please.

Mr. Dave Mercer: I am.

I also want to see the government provide companies with financial and logistical support to conduct this critical work, which would keep some of our members employed and put the industry right back on its footing for a restart. The fact of the matter is that the question of health and safety becomes a moot point for our members in the offshore oil and gas industries if companies simply walk away and decide to lay everyone off. There is plenty of health and safety work that needs to be done, and our members are ready to do it. Let's make sure that this work is completed and that vital health and safety regulations are put in place permanently to protect our workers in the offshore industry.

I will be happy to take any questions and provide further insight into our members' experience in the offshore industry.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mercer, and to both of our witnesses.

We're going to start with Mr. McLean. We'll go through one round of six-minute questions here, and then we'll move into the second panel.

Mr. McLean, we go over to you.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you both for coming before this committee today. I apologize on behalf of all of the government that we're late in getting to this.

I want to talk about that gap that exists at this point in time, and I'll ask you both. Can you tell me how this four-month gap between when the regulations ended in December 2020 and now, or when we pass this bill—which hopefully will be as soon as possible—is affecting the workers and your industry? I'd like to hear from both of you on that.

• (1130)

Ms. Charlene Johnson: I can start, Dave, if you want.

In terms of the safety of the workers offshore, I don't see any impact in the interim four months or even until we get to the end of the year. The Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board, which regulates the industry, is in the process of issuing—and it may have done this already—an addendum to each of the offshore operators' authorization basically indicating that each operator must continue to follow the provisions that are contained in the transitional offshore regulations even though they have expired.

CAPP, the Canada Association of Petroleum Producers, actually went above and beyond that and developed six industry best practice documents. They have now become actual codes of practice that the C-NLOPB has adopted.

I'm not fearful for the safety of the offshore workers, but it just comes down to the fact that something as paramount as safety really shouldn't be taking seven or eight years. It's time we get it done and move on. We always look to international best practices. We want the best, most modern safety regulations there are for people working in very remote, harsh environments.

I'm confident that all the safety measures are still in place as per the operation authorities of these operators. It's more, as I said in my opening remarks, just another thing that takes so long to get done in our offshore. Especially when it comes to safety and the offshore, it shouldn't take this long.

Mr. Dave Mercer: If I may, I will just jump in here and mirror the image that Charlene was talking about. Yes, the C-NLOPB is in full force there and it is the regulator, but speaking on the members side of it, I can say that it's confusing for them. We had to have meetings with them offshore and explain to them that all of the regulations that were in place should still be in place and that they should always follow up with us if there are any questions for the C-NLOPB or any other questions.

They were kind of confused for the most part because they didn't know if they were left without any at all. For us, it was more for information and to ensure that they knew that somehow they would be covered.

Ms. Charlene Johnson: If I could—

Mr. Greg McLean: Go ahead.

Ms. Charlene Johnson: I would just add, Mr. McLean, that we were really pleased to see how quickly the Department of Natural Resources was in touch with us following the Senate meeting. We did commit at that time to contacting our members. We will ensure that if there's a 30-day turnaround, we will get you responses in 30 days. It came out quickly; it went back quickly, and we're looking forward to the next round.

In the meantime, while this process is unfolding, there is something that can happen in conjunction that would definitely help in the area of safety, and that is expediting the appointments of qualified candidates for the occupational health and safety advisory council here in Newfoundland and Labrador. As I said, that has been in place in Nova Scotia since March of 2019. I don't see any reason why that needs to be held off as we're going through this process, and it's something that should be done.

Mr. Greg McLean: Thank you.

I know these regulations had to go through the provincial legislatures as well, and they didn't seem to receive that much of a delay. Somehow at the federal level it's taken six years since the bill was introduced in Parliament and we're still dealing with retroactive legislation in order to make this pertinent for the period during which it has lapsed.

What's taking the federal government so long when the two provincial governments seemed to get through a little more quickly? Either or both of you can answer.

Ms. Charlene Johnson: I guess that is the question. I'm not sure. I understand that it was noted back in early 2020 that we should have a draft by March of 2020, consultation take place, and then regulations in effect by the end of 2020.

Now, I'm not sure why two years more than was originally intended would be needed when it was going to be done in eight to 10 months. I would only surmise that Bill C-69 was a major priority at that time. I know it got through in a fairly quick manner, but I guess I can't answer the question.

Whenever we have been consulted, we have been very expeditious about getting back. I understand that the province is doing the same. My understanding is that the minister said they're waiting for this too. I wish I could provide you with more answers, but I don't know.

• (1135)

Mr. Greg McLean: Thank you.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Mr. McLean.

Mr. Greg McLean: Mr. Mercer, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Dave Mercer: Yes. All I'll say is that we were told a long time ago that this would be pretty easy to do and to get done, but it keeps getting pushed ahead and pushed ahead and pushed ahead. When they started it back in February and tried to put something together, everybody who was involved jumped on the bandwagon and tried to push this. I don't see why we're stalling now.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Mercer and Mr. McLean.

I'm going to stick very close to the timelines here, guys, so that we can try to get everything in.

Ms. Jones is up next, assuming her headset is working. If it's not, then I believe Mr. Lefebvre will go ahead.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I still don't have my headset. IT is working on the remote access to my computer. I may have to pass this to MP Lefebvre.

The Chair: Are you talking through your headset now? I'm hearing you loud and clear.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: No. It's not connected. I'm on my iPhone. It's fine, but I don't think it will work for translation.

The Chair: I don't think so either.

Madam Clerk, can you just verify that?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Hilary Jane Powell): Ms. Jones, can I ask you to say a few more words? We'll see if interpretation is able to hear you or not.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Okay. Great.

I'm connected remotely from Labrador west today. We have IT issues in our office. Welcome to the world of technology. I was hoping to be able to participate—

The Clerk: You can.

The Chair: That works?

The Clerk: Yes. The interpreters have told me that they can make do.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Jones, you're on for six minutes.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Wonderful. Thank you very much.

First of all, Ms. Johnson and Mr. Mercer, I would like to welcome you to committee today. It's great to have you both here. I know how difficult this past year has been for the industry. I really want to compliment you on the stellar job you've been doing in keeping the industry going in Newfoundland and Labrador, but most of all for supporting so many workers who have been affected by COVID.

I have just a couple of questions. First of all, with regard to the bill, is there anything in this bill that is of tremendous concern to you that you want to make us aware of up front?

Ms. Johnson, I'm wondering if you can clarify for the committee what the jurisdictional issue is with regard to offshore oil and gas exploration and development in Newfoundland and Labrador—whether it's federal and provincial as equal partners or whether either of those partners can act unilaterally in doing what needs to be done within the industry.

I'll leave it at those two questions, Mr. Chair. If there's enough time, I do have some others.

Ms. Charlene Johnson: I guess the general concern with this bill is that it isn't done yet. In terms of the specific issues, the list is dozens of pages long. I'm not an expert in the specific areas. You'll probably be hearing from the Atlantic director of CAPP, Paul Barnes. The type of feedback that comes to us from our members is around lifeboats, diving, accommodation quarters, lifting of materials on cranes and documentation. It's all-encompassing. As I mentioned, they are already in place. The operators have to abide by the transitional regulations that were in place, but it's just getting this over the finish line to the end-point.

With regard to your question, Ms. Jones, I think you were asking if this can be done unilaterally. My understanding is that it cannot. This is a joint process between the province and the federal government as per the Atlantic Accord act.

Did you have something more specific than that? I'm not sure if I answered your question.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Does this lend itself to two layers of approvals that would have to occur, and is it a more time-consuming and more expensive process? That's one question. As well, how has COVID-19, especially in the early days, affected the industry from an administrative and technical work front? I know there's been difficulty. You spoke about it publicly early on.

• (1140)

Ms. Charlene Johnson: Yes, my understanding of the way the process works is that the federal government is doing all of the drafting of the regulations, and it is keeping the province informed. My understanding is that there is some consideration for allowing the general public and the province and associations like ourselves to see the draft at the same time. I'm not sure if that is the case. I know that's one of the things being considered by the department to streamline and speed up this process so we can get it done in a year.

As for COVID and its impacts, Dave, you might be able to speak to this more. We've seen, as with everyone and every industry, that many people are pivoting in different ways and it's really advancing things by years that we didn't know could have been done before. There are some great examples because companies have already been focusing on digitalization and moving staff onshore who used to have to be offshore. You may be aware that Exxon have a control centre onshore now. Those are folks who would have had to be offshore before are now home in their beds every night. From the safety perspective, that's positive.

I think some of this got advanced because of COVID. In this sense, some positives come from COVID as well, but just generally, COVID has had a significant impact on our industry because of the reduction in demand for the oil product and then, of course, the resulting reduction in price. I won't get into that here today because that's not about safety, but there's a page long list of deferrals and delays and cancellations that have happened in our offshore that have resulted in the thousands of layoffs Dave referred to in his opening remarks.

Dave, maybe you can get into more specifics about COVID and technology.

Mr. Dave Mercer: Thank you.

You were doing a wonderful job on it. You can keep going if you like.

Yes, so to add to Charlene's points, I remember starting in Hibernia back in 1997 and I remember the OIM at the time having a meeting with us and saying that in 20 years' time, this facility wouldn't be the way we saw it, because a lot of the work would be done from onshore. He was right. Things have improved and technology has advanced and ExxonMobil has their own CR set-up now in their office, in their building here in St. John's. Yes, people do get to go home at night, but for the most part, many workers still work offshore. Although technology has changed in that way—

The Chair: I'm going to have to stop you there, Mr. Mercer. I apologize but we have to move to our next questioner.

Mr. Simard, over to you.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Could you tell me how much time I have left, please?

[English]

The Chair: You have six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: I have a brief question for you, Ms. Johnson.

Does this mean that since December 31, the industry has been regulating itself in matters of health and safety?

Mr. Mercer, my next question is for you. I'd like to understand the distinction between the permanent regulations and what we are presenting as transitional provisions.

Does this mean that the transitional provisions would be inadequate to ensure worker health and safety?

I don't know if you have any specific cases like those. I don't understand why we can't establish permanent regulations. It seems to me that it's taking a long to reach consensus on this matter. Can you explain why?

[English]

Ms. Charlene Johnson: The industry is regulated by the C-NLOPB, who are the ones responsible for issuing that addendum to the operators offshore. My point was that operators are just going to continue with the practices they have as per the transitional regulations. Hence, I wouldn't call it self-regulating. They're still definitely regulated by the C-NLOPB.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: The next question is for Mr. Mercer, but you could answer it too, Ms. Johnson.

I'd like to know what this distinction between transitional provisions and permanent regulations really amounts to.

Does this mean that the transitional provisions are not adequate at the moment to ensure the safety of workers?

[English]

Mr. Dave Mercer: I think there have to be permanent regulations put in place so that we can make amendments to them, going forward. Why should we have temporary regulations in place and never have them put...? This is taking too long. I certainly believe that having permanent regulations in place would help solidify all of these regulations. If we're going to make any amendments to them, at least we have something sound and factual to make them to. Right now, we don't have any permanent regulations in place. Frankly, our workers' lives offshore depend on the occupational health and safety regulations.

Ms. Charlene Johnson: Further to that, it's about having clarity. In some of the drafts that we've seen to date—and again, CAPP is more the an expert on this—some of the language that is being proposed for the permanent regulations was duplicative and inconsistent with some offshore regulations. It's about fine tuning all of that and getting it right so that there is extra clarity.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Would you be prepared to say that management and the union are part of the consensus on your point of view?

Is there a form of consensus on the safety rules that need to be put in place?

[English]

Ms. Charlene Johnson: On the specific regulations, CAPP was working with the business community, and unions, doctors, offshore workers and offshore health and safety committees. I think each one of those would have responded in their respective areas of expertise. I certainly get the sense that there is a lot of consensus among them. I wouldn't want to speak for everyone, but there's nothing that comes to mind with respect to a regulation where one group is at odds with the other. I think there's full consensus that we need to get this done so that we can have the clarity and the consistency for those who are operating and working in our offshore.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Mercer, did the union make any particular demands with respect to permanent regulations?

[English]

Mr. Dave Mercer: I wouldn't say that we hit the mains. When the draft of the occupational health and safety regulations came out, we were able to make comments on it. It was due at the end of March, I believe. We made lots of comments and there were lots of ideas put forward. I'll give you one example. Offshore right now, we have first-aid programs for personnel with injuries—broken arms, broken legs, etc.—but we don't have anything in the regulations that covers mental health. There is no training offshore for mental health, only for first aid, so we wanted to implement and add physical and mental health training for mental illness.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: A person on an offshore platform is there until...

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Simard, you only have 10 seconds. I'm going to have to stop you right at the end of that.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Mercer, you mentioned mental health.

Generally speaking, when people are on an offshore platform, how long do they have to stay there?

[English]

Mr. Dave Mercer: Basically, when you go offshore, you go for 21 days; then you're home for 21 days.

The Chair: Thank you, I'm going to have to stop you there.

Mr. Harris, we'll go over to you for six minutes. You'll be the last person asking questions in this panel.

Thank you.

● (1150)

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank both of the witnesses for appearing today—Mr. Mercer and Ms. Johnson. I should note that Ms. Johnson and I, along with Ms. Jones, served in the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador, so we have experience with each other in another forum. It's good to see you both here today.

First of all, I want to note that it's been almost 30 years, or will be almost 30 years, since offshore safety was actually put in the hands of the C-NLOPB, the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board, and taken from the provincial and federal departments of labour that were formerly in charge of occupational health and safety in the offshore. That has been very disappointing to the unions from day one, in my experience, as I was in the House of Assembly when that was done in 1992. It was not until 2014 that there were actually enforceable regulations put in place.

These are the first attempts to do that in an enforceable way to provide the protection of the right to refuse unsafe work, to be able participate and have a say in the situation, and to have the same level of protection as you would have onshore.

It's particularly concerning that this has taken so long. I wonder if we had in place an independent offshore safety board, as recommended by Justice Wells of the Offshore Helicopter Safety Inquiry, whether there would be this delay of six or seven or eight years since 2014 to get these regulations in place.

Could both Mr. Mercer and Ms. Johnson comment on that, because Justice Wells asked for a separate, powerful, independent, knowledgeable body equipped with expert advice that would be devoted only to ensuring that the offshore health and safety regime were adequate.

Would that be in place now if we had that separate board? What's your opinion, Ms. Johnson and Mr. Mercer?

Ms. Charlene Johnson: I don't know where the delay lies, so I don't know if we can land that in the hands of the C-NLOPB, or if it's within the federal Department of Natural Resources. I'm not privy to know where those delays lie.

I do know that the C-NLOPB gets accolades around the world from the operators here for their expertise in safety and environment. They're spoken really highly of. However, as you know, Mr. Harris, they are also responsible for things like land sales and maximizing the recovery of the resource, so there was a suggestion to separate the two.

I've been saying for a number of years that we need an entity in this province that focuses solely on maximizing the recovery of the resource just like U.K. Oil & Gas Authority and the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate have done. Maybe that is for the C-NLOPB as well, but with more resources. Maybe it's for somebody else in the C-NLOPB that focuses on safety and environment only.

We don't have a position as to who should do what. It just needs to be done in a manner that safety and the environment are first, and then there is that focus on developing our resources in a timely manner. I say this because when it comes to regulations—not just occupational health and safety, but also numerous other ones—with the time it takes in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Canada, compared with other jurisdictions, we are way behind other jurisdictions. That makes us less competitive.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Mercer.

Mr. Dave Mercer: To add to Ms. Johnson's remarks, the C-NLOPB has been doing a great job from the standpoint of protecting the offshore workers, yes, and following the regulations and ensuring that the operators are following them as well. As you can see from when Suncor was shut down, they went in and shut it down because there were violations.

The answer to Mr. Harris's question is that they still need enabling legislation. If there has to be a separate one, let's make a separate one. The fact of the matter is that we have to do whatever we possibly can to make it easier to protect the people in our workplace offshore. If we have to put an independent one in place, then so be it.

• (1155)

Mr. Jack Harris: The question is not a question of the expertise, I guess, but a question of focus. It's been a long time and it hasn't been finished. Now the federal government obviously has responsibility.

What about the advisory board, Mr. Mercer? Was your organization consulted on the appointment of representatives to the federal or the provincial board?

Mr. Dave Mercer: Yes, and we did reach out to make sure we were part of that, but there was a lot of red tape I had to go through just to get assigned. You have to go in and apply for an appointment and I did that. I haven't heard anything back yet, but it is in the process and we'll see what happens when they get through that.

The government has reached out to us and we're working on that right now.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mercer and Mr. Harris.

Unfortunately, that's all the time we have for this panel.

I want to thank Ms. Johnson and Mr. Mercer, and I apologize to Mr. Mercer. My job is to make sure we stick to the time limits and I'm always cutting people off, and there always seems to be one person I cut off more than the other, and today that was you, so my apologies. I assure you, it was nothing personal.

Mr. Dave Mercer: It's okay because if we get on here the third time, you'll take that and give me all the time. No worries.

The Chair: All right. You have my word on that one. Good.

Thank you very much, both of you. I appreciate that. You're free to log off now.

We are now moving to our second panel, which is Minister Seamus O'Regan and two of the departmental staff, Mr. Hargrove and Mr. Gardiner.

I'm going to open the floor to the minister, and then we're going to have time for one round of questions.

Part of the reason I was trying to rush the first round is that the minister has been kind enough to extend his time until 12:30 and I didn't want to lose any more of that time than necessary.

I will stop talking now and turn it over to the minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

I'm addressing this committee from my home on the island of Newfoundland—the ancestral homeland of the Mi'kmaq and Beothuk Peoples.

[*English*]

Not only that, it's also one of Canada's three proud oil-producing provinces.

I want to thank members for supporting our request to expedite the passage of this important legislation.

This issue is important to me. It's personal. It's about an industry that has brought so many benefits to my province. It impacts the workers here—my neighbours, my friends—who work in our offshore. I remember vividly the industry's nascent days. I was a young fellow working for Premier Brian Tobin some 20-odd years ago when the first platform, Hibernia, was under construction. Hopes were sky-high after so much despair about the cod fishery collapse in 1992. Today, it is a proud and mature industry, one that has accounted over the years for 30% of our economy, one out of every 10 jobs and 10% of employment. In fact, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador relies more on its royalties from oil than even the governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The opening of the offshore industry in the Atlantic has created jobs and wealth for Nova Scotians, too, prior to and during the recent decommissioning of its two gas projects.

This, right now, is about the health and safety of the workers who built those great projects. This is about protecting them.

When I spoke about Bill S-3 to members of the Senate in February, I was struck by a remark from Nova Scotia Senator Jane Cordy. She said that when you live on the ocean, you understand the strength of the ocean.

The power of the sea is by no means lost on many of us. The president of ExxonMobil Canada told me that there is no harsher environment on the planet in which his company operates than Newfoundland's offshore.

The sea is powerful. That power also has tragic consequences. Two tragedies stand out for me. The first is the sinking of the Ocean Ranger, when all 84 on board perished during a terrible North Atlantic winter storm in 1982. I remember delivering the newspaper the next day and the size of that headline.

A royal commission led to new safety measures then; yet in 2009, tragedy struck again. A helicopter ferrying 18 workers to an offshore platform plunged into the ocean and only one—miraculously—survived. A judicial inquiry was struck that led to the passage in 2014 of the Offshore Health and Safety Act. The government of the day set up an interim safety regime, while giving officials five years to finalize permanent regulations. That deadline was extended by two years, and now we're asking for a new extension that would give us until the end of this calendar year to complete this work.

I know some members are ready to scream and shout “failure” over these delays, and frustration. I will tell you that it is warranted and shared. I'm frustrated. I said so during the Senate hearings and I'll repeat it again today: It should not have taken this long.

Consider this. One of our officials told senators that the original five-year schedule was ambitious, even if everything went like clockwork, because this is a complex process. We're talking about three governments and two independent regulatory bodies. This is how our offshore works. It's a joint management framework. The Atlantic Accord act clearly outlines areas of responsibility and stipulates decisions that require joint ratification. Therefore, you can't go it alone.

In addition, we've undertaken broad consultations with stakeholders, including industry—especially unions—all needing to find common ground on regulations filling some 300 pages. These regulations incorporate, by reference, 173 domestic and international standards, which are contained in documents totalling more than 15,000 pages.

Then it had to be put into legal language, in both languages. Toss in elections, a pandemic and a major interruption in 2017 when officials fixed parts of the 2014 interim regulations that were causing problems for the industry. All of that set us back.

Now, some will criticize these delays, and that is fair. Some of you may say that we can't blame the pandemic for all of this, and that is true to a certain extent. However, think of how long it took

this committee, and how long it took Parliament, to figure out how to function in a pandemic.

• (1200)

All of our technical advisers at the federal and provincial levels, with their respective occupational health and safety departments, have been on the front lines of the COVID response.

However, it is misleading to say that this government doesn't care about workers. I mean, nothing could be further from the truth. These are my neighbours. These are the people who have built our province into what it is. Workers are at the heart of everything that we do here.

We're finalizing a world-class safety regime, and at the same time supporting an industry still hurting due to the pandemic and brutal 2020 oil market conditions. The reality is that not since the time of Brian Mulroney and John Crosbie has there been more done for the offshore by a federal government—by this government.

In 2019, \$2.5 billion went to Newfoundland and Labrador as part of the renewed Atlantic Accord agreement. There has been close to \$400 million to support workers and to lower emissions in the offshore during a pandemic. What industry has been asking us for years, we have done: reducing the time for exploratory drilling assessments from over 900 days to 90 days, without losing an inch of environmental integrity.

Just last week, I announced 16 projects funded through the offshore component of the emissions reduction fund. These are projects that can use carbon capture, that use wind and other renewable sources of energy that could power the industry's operations, projects that will lower emissions. In the face of challenges, we've had our workers' backs, and we continue to have their backs to protect them.

Mr. Chair, I am proud, as a son of Newfoundland and Labrador, of what we have achieved since this industry began to take root in the 1960s. The offshore industry has made life better for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It has kept families from separating in order to find work on the mainland.

[*Translation*]

We must protect these workers. The best way? By adopting a world-class security regime. I believe in it and I support it.

Bill S-3 will go a long way. I urge you to also support it.

I'm joined here today by my officials: Glenn Hargrove, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Petroleum Policy and Investment Office; and Tim Gardiner, Senior Director, Offshore Petroleum Management, Strategic Petroleum Policy and Investment Office.

I'm pleased now to take questions.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, particularly for accommodating our delays today.

We will have time for one full six-minute round.

I believe, Mr. McLean, that you're starting off.

• (1205)

Mr. Greg McLean: Yes, I am.

Minister, I think your boom mike went down. The last part of your comments weren't clear.

Let me start by asking you a question.

Charlene Johnson, from Noia, was here before you, and she talked about the disease of delay around this issue in the offshore. It's been six years since December 2014, of course, when we actually needed to move this legislation forward. Six years is a long time for the federal government to get some regulations firmly in place, and we have failed in that—the government has failed.

The question, of course, is why did we fail?

I think even more failure is on the horizon. When you talked about the initial government bill coming here, the Senate wanted two years to get this done right, and two years would be a long time from now. It's not the end of 2021, but the end of 2022.

Can you explain the delay once more, and can you also tell us if you support the Senate amendments that were brought forward to limit it to a one-year timeline and have those regulations done at the end of this calendar year, 2021, please?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I thank the honourable member for his question.

It did take too long. There's no question about it.

This isn't in whatever notes were prepared for me, but I will say this and I think most Newfoundlanders and Labradorians would agree with me. The offshore has never figured very highly on the national lens or the national scope. I remember, in fact, in our first full year in office, there was a contingent that attended CERAWEEK in Houston, as the member well knows. NRCan officials were there. The minister was there. I believe our premier of the day was there, as well as associate ministers and premiers from other provinces. It was a big celebration of Canadian energy. As NRCan made its opening remarks on behalf of the Canadian contingent, it spoke of the great oil producing provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. There was an awkward pause as every Newfoundlander and Labradorian in the room waited for their province to be recognized as an oil producing province. It was not.

There is an institutional bias that I obviously have fought very hard to make sure to rectify, although to be fair to my colleagues, by the time I had arrived at NRCan, I think that lesson had been learned. I don't cast aspersions on either party. I think this is just sometimes the Ottawa mentality. The bottom line is that Newfoundland and Labrador is the third and very important oil producing

province. Therefore, it deserves the same attention and is wanting of the same attention, particularly on things that are as important as safety regulations.

The regulations themselves are complex. As I said, they total near 300 pages. Let me reassert that when it comes to the lives and safety of the men and women who work in our offshore, you don't take shortcuts. We owe them that to keep them safe.

You consider the domestic and international standards—

Mr. Greg McLean: I'm sorry to intervene. I only have a little bit of time here. I appreciate your answering these questions. Let me ask the next question, please.

This has taken 27 sitting days in Parliament. It's something you and I can grapple with. There were 27 sitting days from the time this received first reading until the time it received second reading on April 30. How much legislation went through the House of Commons when I had clearly indicated to your office that we wanted this moved forward as quickly as possible to get workers protected on the offshore? Yet it languished, it seems, in your government's House leader's office. We heard the bleating from your deputy House leader that we were being partisan, yet on bills we agree on, we weren't moving this one forward. We were asking to get these workers protected and we were saying we will pass this quickly, yet it waited.

Can you tell me why it waited in the lineup to get on the House of Commons agenda, please?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: To be honest with you, I don't know if I'm capable of wading into the minutiae that goes on behind the scenes and the tos and fros on what we get onto a government agenda. I'm very grateful that it is on now. I'm very grateful to the honourable member and to his party and to other parties present for making it such priority. I will say that. It's with your help that we were able to get this done, so I'm very grateful for the moment.

Also, ingrained in every Newfoundlander and Labradorian is the fact that the offshore for Newfoundland and Labrador is jointly managed. Therefore, everything has to be not just vetted and agreed upon by Canada, but also by Newfoundland and Labrador and in Nova Scotia by Nova Scotia. There are three governments. It's not something that happens at the snap of your fingers. It is complex. It does take time. I think that's precisely why the original bill in 2014 included a five-year period to get it done.

There have been extensive engagements with stakeholders, particularly through the 2016 to 2018 period. In fact, there was an amendment to the transitional regulations in 2017 to address a number of administrative irritants then. That fix set us back some time. Then with COVID, nobody could ignore the impacts of the global pandemic. It forced us to change the way we do everything, including institutional processes like regulation, drafting and adapting to virtual working. All of that was challenging, but I am confident that the work that remains to be completed within the time that this bill would provide will get done and it will be passed.

• (1210)

Mr. Greg McLean: Thank you, Minister.

Six years have gone past and right now we're in that dead zone where we don't have those regulations. One last time, I will encourage you in my last comments here to move this very quickly, so these workers are protected.

I think that's all my time, but thank you very much for being here today.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I could not agree with you more. You have my word.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLean.

Ms. Jones, I believe you are next.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Minister. It's good to see you at our committee today.

First of all, as a parliamentarian in Newfoundland and Labrador, I want to thank you for the work you did in securing the oil industry and investments in the oil industry in our province through the pandemic. We heard earlier from Mr. Mercer from the union. We know how workers were impacted. I have to say that you did a remarkable job in responding to the needs of the industry in what was a difficult time.

We talk a lot about the drafting of the bill and what needs to happen between now and December 31. I understand your commitment, but as I indicated earlier, this is not just unilateral. It has to be done with the provinces as well, in this case with Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. I know you have a great relationship with your provincial counterparts in both places, but can you speak to that relationship? How critical will it be to meeting this parliamentary deadline of December 31 to fulfill what the industry has been asking for for a long time?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I thank the honourable member for her question. As she knows, yes, all parties and both chambers of Parliament have worked expeditiously on this bill while doing their due diligence. In a minority Parliament, what we're seeing on this—people should know—is co-operation and collaboration and regular communication on the things that are really important.

It extends beyond this House. It extends, as the honourable member for Labrador knows, to joint management and the Atlantic Accord. It's something that just about every Newfoundlander and Labradorian, certainly ones of my age who remember the fighting days of the 1980s and the 1990s, knows ensures that joint management exists. That is a real and fulsome relationship, with true joint management of the offshore resources between the Government of Canada and the Government of Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in their respective jurisdictions.

When it became clear in the fall of 2020 that the final regulations wouldn't be completed by December 31, 2020, our government and the Newfoundland and Labrador government and the Nova Scotia government each took legislative steps to extend the transition peri-

od so that workers would be protected under the existing occupational health and safety framework that existed.

If there is anybody out there watching with any doubt in their mind, every worker was looked after. We made sure that the transition period existed. It was at that point, for the federal government, that in order to signal our intent, this bill was introduced in the Senate on December 1. The bill was amended; passed by the Senate in mid-February, when it was introduced in the House; and in a similar time frame now, it's come to this committee. So things are moving.

I once again want to commend members of this committee on all sides of the House for the priority they've given this.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Thank you.

Chair, do I have some time left?

The Chair: Yes. You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Wonderful.

The oil and gas industry, as you indicated, Minister, is definitely one of the priority industries, if not “the” priority, for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It sometimes seems like we're constantly competing in this industry with our western counterparts. I have to acknowledge the fact that you've certainly moved the dial on that and ensured that attention was being focused on the oil and gas industry in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Of course, as MP Harris outlined earlier when Ms. Johnson was on, I think we all have a history in this industry in the province, and have all, at one point, had our hand in different policies and regulation pieces around it. Maybe you could talk a little bit about how Bill S-3 will affect workers in this province into the future, and how important it is for a province like Newfoundland and Labrador.

• (1215)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I don't have to remind the honourable member of the Ocean Ranger, and I certainly don't have to remind the honourable member of Cougar 491. They have left indelible marks on our province. I remember being a paper boy delivering that newspaper, the Evening Telegram, with that headline.

I remember that one of my neighbours was a man who had received one of the distress calls and how he didn't leave his house for a week. His newspapers just kept piling up. I remember delivering those papers because I remember my street had a lot of older people who waited all day for their newspaper to be delivered and stood in their door just waiting to see that paper to make it real for them. It shook us to the core and that continues to this day.

When you look at Cougar 491 and that crash, it just reminded us all of how important safety is in what is still a very dangerous business. It is one where all hands are completely committed to the highest safety regulations. I can't say that enough about the unions. I can't say that enough about the principals who were out their drilling the oil. I can't say that enough about government.

But, it is really important, particularly in the wake of the recommendations after the crash of Cougar 491, that those regulations be updated and that all hands agree on what they should be and that we enforce them. This is a major step forward in that direction, building on a long and proud history now of some 30 years of working in the North Atlantic in the offshore in what ExxonMobil Canada calls the harshest environment they operate in. You can only operate in a harsh environment like that if everybody understands what a priority safety is, and that this is the only way it's going to work. We feel now that all our people there will be best served by the absolute most up-to-date safety regulations held and enforced by everybody involved.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Jones.

Moving on to Mr. Simard, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're pleased to have you back with us, Minister.

We had also discussed Bill S-3. I had assured you that I had no objection and would not do anything to prevent the bill from moving forward expeditiously. I believe things should go smoothly.

Since everyone seems to be cooperative, I hope that you will allow me to ask you a question about the energy sector.

In your address, you spoke more broadly about the energy sector. I'd like to raise a concern I have about the hydrogen strategy you are currently deploying. I am specifically referring to grey hydrogen. I don't think it should be part of a green shift.

Before implementing this strategy, I believe that it would be important for you to give consideration to the relationship between hydrogen production and what it means in terms of carbon. I don't know if you've been made aware of that.

[*English*]

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. May.

Mr. Bryan May: Mr. Chair, I will let Mario finish his question because I was hoping he was going to come back around to what we're talking about, but I would ask for relevance on that question.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Simard, we need to keep our questions focused on the three clauses of the bill that's before us. I'd ask that you....

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Chair, I would simply like to comment that Ms. Jones mentioned the importance of the petroleum sector to Newfoundland and Labrador more generally. I believe that the fossil fuels energy sector has been discussed more generally by a number of colleagues. The minister, in his presentation, also made a few more general comments about the sector. That's where I'm coming from too.

• (1220)

[*English*]

The Chair: That's fine, and I don't want to cut you short, but if you're asking about something that's relevant to the bill, it's one thing. Certainly the importance of the sector to Newfoundland, obviously, is connected to this legislation, but I think you veered off the path a little bit there, so if you could just focus back on the legislation, we would be grateful.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard: Will Newfoundland and Labrador be included in the hydrogen strategy?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: That's right. Absolutely.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right, thanks.

Mr. Simard, you have the next question, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard: I don't want to put you on the spot.

I'm going to return to what my friend Mr. McLean said a short while ago. Quite a lot of time went by before the bill reached us. In response to Mr. McLean, you said that you did not want to get involved in the machinery of government. And yet, it would appear that there is consensus on the bill. I don't think anyone here is going to raise any objections.

Don't you think that various delays kept bumping this bill lower down on the legislative agenda? The prorogation of the House and other matters also slowed us down.

[*English*]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Yes, Monsieur Simard, there were a number of things that added up. The end result is that I'm not terribly happy with the fact that it has taken this long, and again, I'm grateful to everyone here and to all parties for understanding the weight of the issue. The co-operation that we've seen is something Canadians should know about, because you don't hear often enough what happens when we all agree on something. I think that's important and agree that something needs to be improved, i.e., the timeline of this important measure. To revisit some of the numbers, we are talking of 173 domestic and international standards and some 15,000 pages, and we wanted to make sure that we got it right. Again, some of these reasons I will brook, but others don't seem to add up, obviously, and that is why I wanted to make this work as quickly as possible. That relied heavily on you, on this committee and on our respective parties and, again, I'm very grateful for that.

When you look at the next 12 months, again, there will be no shortcuts then either when it comes to the health and safety of workers on our offshore, and no shortcuts when it comes to keeping them safe. While the bill before senators may only have three clauses, the regulations they address were far more substantial, and we have a detailed implementation schedule in place with the Department of Justice and with our provincial partners.

As I've noted, there are a number of statutory requirements as well as stakeholder engagement and provincial coordination that have to happen. Particularly in the current environment, it's not something that we can take shortcuts on; we need to get these regulations right. Workers definitely deserve no less than that, and they certainly deserve the commitment of so many members of this committee and our respective parties, and I'm delighted to bear witness to that.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mario, you're under 10 seconds. Use them as you see fit.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Do you have an accurate timeline for the implementation of permanent regulations?

[English]

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Simard. I think we're out of time.

We're going to have to move on to Mr. Harris, who will be last up on this panel.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Minister O'Regan this morning.

Thank you for joining us.

I share with you, of course, the memories of the Ocean Ranger tragedy and the Cougar helicopter tragedy. I attended the hearings of both of those inquiries. In fact, I had standing at the offshore helicopter inquiry run by Justice Wells. I know how important offshore safety is to everybody, but only in 2014 did we have enforceable regulations for safety in the offshore in the same way they occurred on land, so it's very important that they be in place.

I understand that they're complicated, and it takes time to get these put in place, even though 300 pages is not really a lot for regulations. Nevertheless, what galls me and I think many people is the fact that this regime was allowed to lapse on December 31 of last year. The regulations since then are unenforceable in the same sense that they were. That's spelled out in the legislation itself. No one can be convicted of an offence under the regulations if it occurred between January 1 of this year and whenever this law is put into place. By the way, we want to put them in place as quickly as possible, and we support that.

Can the minister explain how it is that these offshore safety regulations were allowed to lapse in the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore? It wouldn't happen to any other regulations. Is this a case of someone being asleep at the switch or not realizing the importance of these regulations in the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore?

• (1225)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I thank the honourable member for his question.

No, I don't think it's a case of anybody being asleep at the switch. It is an incredibly important question to get right, so I'll ask Tim Gardiner from my department to maybe flesh out for you what happened here and precisely answer your questions, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: I want a short answer, not a long answer. I want a precise answer, because I have only a few more minutes left.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: He's good at that. Understood.

Tim.

Mr. Timothy Gardiner (Senior Director, Offshore Petroleum Management Division, Department of Natural Resources): I'll do my best.

I guess what I would focus on is how we're assuring that worker safety continues to be [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and applies these regulations back retroactively. The government's intent and the basic rules that employers are expected to follow are clearly understood and will be brought back to January 1 of this year.

Provincial regulations continue to be in effect. We have offshore boards that have the ability to attach conditions to any activity that's authorized in the offshore, including compliance with OHS regulations.

The legal framework for occupational health and safety under section 3.1 of the act is quite detailed. That continues to be in effect as well. It provides an avenue for criminal sanctions should there be an incident in this intervening period. When the federal regulations are reapplied retroactively, the ability to pursue administrative sanctions will then be in place. Administrative sanctions can be quite severe, up to and including withdrawing an activity authorization. It could be shutting down a platform, for instance.

All of that is to say—

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, sir. I think we saw it in the offshore before there were any regulations, that, "oh, we can enforce them; we can shut down the rig". Of course, that never, ever, ever happened, and wouldn't happen under this regime right now.

Minister O'Regan, one of the other important points in the 2014 legislation was the appointment of offshore joint worker and employer and government advisory committees. They've had since 2014 to put those in place as well. There isn't one for the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore as of yet, although I'm told by you, of course, that the federal appointments have been made. There is one in Nova Scotia. That was put in place in 2019 and has been meeting.

Why has it taken since 2014 to put in place these advisory committees, and why have the unions not been consulted on the appointments?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: As the honourable member acknowledged, we've been ready with our appointments and been ready to sit down at the table. The provinces had a heck of a lot going on. Maybe what I can do is tell the member that we will certainly be sitting down and approaching the provinces about this as quickly as possible to see how quickly we can form this up. There's a tremendous amount of goodwill, I believe, at the moment.

Mr. Mercer, who appeared previous to me, would be able to speak more accurately to this point, but from what I can see, since we put the additional \$320 million towards the offshore in pandemic relief, with the objective of looking after workers, retraining workers and lowering emissions, they have had a seat at the table with industry and with the provincial government to determine what projects will get that \$320 million. They've also been somewhat involved in the emissions reduction fund as well.

So there's a congeniality there. There are good relationships that exist. We want them to exist in an institutional way in exactly the groups that you're talking about. Now that we have this moving along fairly quickly, that will certainly be the next step. We're ready to sit down at the table.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Harris. Unfortunately, that is all the time for both of you.

Minister, thank you on behalf of the committee. You are always generous in trying to accommodate us and appear before this committee to answer questions. For that we are very grateful, and today is no exception to that.

If you will forgive us, we will now move quickly to clause-by-clause on this bill. Thank you and good afternoon.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I'll leave it to you. Good afternoon, Jamie.

It is indeed the afternoon.

The Chair: I had to double-check the clock here.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Take care. I thank you all very much.

The Chair: We are now moving on to clause-by-clause.

Thank you, everybody. I apologize for trying to move things so quickly, but I was trying to get both panels completed, which we managed to do.

Going on to the bill itself, everybody has it before them, I hope.

I will start by calling clause 1.

(Clause 1 agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any debate on clause 2?

Mr. McLean, I see that your hand is up.

Mr. Greg McLean: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The version I have is talking about an expiry date of "eight years after the day on which this section comes into force". I think that was sent by the committee.

Is that an amendment proposed by somebody on this committee, that we change the "seven years" to "eight years"?

The Chair: The version I have says "seven years".

Mr. Greg McLean: The version I have says "eight". It's underlined. That's the latest version.

If we're seven, then yes....

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mine has seven as well.

An hon. member: I have the same.

Mr. Greg McLean: Okay.

Is this somebody's proposed amendment?

The Chair: I have not received any amendments.

Clerk, you have not received any amendments.

Mr. Greg McLean: This definitely came from the clerk.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Greg McLean: Well, if we're agreeing on seven, I will yield.

The Chair: It's seven, as far as I'm aware.

Mr. Patzer and Mr. Harris, you both have your hands up.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): I have a simple clarification question, then.

Did the original text of the bill say "eight years", but then the Senate amended it? They went from two years to one year, and that brought it from eight years to seven years. Is that the dynamic there, I wonder?

Mr. Greg McLean: The bill I have has "eight" underlined in two places, and it's under "Repeal".

The Chair: Mr. Patzer, I believe what you just said is accurate. It is now seven, based on what happened in the Senate.

Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: Can I ask Mr. McLean to look at the front of his bill. Mine says Bill S-3, as passed by the Senate, February 16, 2021.

Mr. Greg McLean: You're right. That's my mistake. Mine says, first reading December 1, 2020.

Mr. Jack Harris: I was concerned about that as well.

However, I do have a question, which is related to.... I guess it's in clause 3, "Coordinating Amendments". I have a question.

The Chair: Okay, then, we're all agreed that in clause 2, it's "seven years", and there's no debate on that.

Shall clause 2 carry?

Mr. Jack Harris: Yes.

Mr. Greg McLean: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair; that was "Repeal", proposed new subsection 5 of section 92, in the version I have. Likewise, with clause 2, it's "eight years" under the proposed new subsection.

The Chair: Sorry, now I'm confused. Where are you—?

Mr. Greg McLean: They're both there, underlining "eight" as opposed to "seven", but like I said, mine is an earlier version. I have the wrong version in front of me, and I apologize.

The Chair: Okay, that's fine. It's important to make sure that we're all working from the same document. Thank you.

(Clause 2 agreed to)

The Chair: On clause 3, is there any debate?

Mr. Harris, I believe you have a question or comment.

• (1235)

Mr. Jack Harris: Yes. I see that that says if the act "receives royal assent" this year, then "sections 1 and 2 are deemed not to have come into force and are repealed", and then a new section is added.

Can someone explain this regime here? What now takes place? Does that reinstate the transitional regulations?

The Chair: Mr. Gardiner could probably answer that, if he's still here. There he is.

Mr. Timothy Gardiner: I am, yes.

Clause 3 will be operational.... Given the passage of time since the bill was introduced, this would be the operative clause, and clauses 1 and 2—

Mr. Jack Harris: That's the retroactivity clause, the one that reinstates them as of January 1.

Mr. Timothy Gardiner: Yes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Harris.

Mr. McLean, is your hand up again or still?

Mr. Greg McLean: No, sorry.

The Chair: Okay, no problem.

Is there any further discussion?

Shall Clause 3 carry?

(Clause 3 agreed to)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I didn't ask if there was any debate on that. I took a leap of faith. Thank you.

Shall the bill carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Shall the chair report the bill to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I think that's it because we didn't make any amendments to the bill.

Madam Clerk, I believe we have taken care of all of our business.

That was highly efficient everybody. Thank you. I'm very grateful.

With no other business today, I will see everybody on Friday when we will pick up where we left off on our study. Enjoy the rest of the week, and we'll see you Friday at 1 o'clock.

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