



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 058

Thursday, April 20, 2023

Chair: Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia



Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Thursday, April 20, 2023

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 58th meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

We have several substitutions this afternoon.

Ms. McPherson is back to replace Ms. Collins. Ms. Pauzé is replaced by Ms. Michaud, who is familiar with our committee, since she has been here in the past. Ms. Goodridge is replacing Mr. Lake, and Mr. McLeod is replacing Mr. Duguid.

Welcome all.

Ms. May, it's a pleasure to see you again.

With us, from Imperial Oil Limited, are Mr. Brad Corson, Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer; Mr. Simon Younger, Senior Vice-President, Upstream; and Ms. Helga Shields, Manager, Environment, Regulatory and Socioeconomic.

[*English*]

Welcome to our committee today. As you know, we always start with opening statements. You have 10 minutes for an opening statement before we go to rounds of questions.

[*Translation*]

I see that Ms. Michaud would like to raise a point of order.

You have the floor, Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would like to move a motion which has already been sent to the clerk.

However, before I read it, I would like to make a verbal request.

I know the committee is only hearing three witnesses today and that the two hours will only be used for the three of them, but I was wondering if we could pretend that we have two panels so that after the first hour, we would reset the time and proceed as if it were the first hour. This would give members who have less speaking time more time to ask questions, as this is a very important meeting. My request may require some discussion. I would ask you to do that.

To come back to my motion, this is what I propose:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the Committee require that any requests for documentation made to witnesses be complied with and that a copy be provided no later than 5:00 p.m. on Friday, May 5, 2023.

This is simply a formality to ensure that if other members and I ask the witnesses to table documents with the committee, that it actually happen before a specific date.

The Chair: All right.

Your motion is on the tabling of documents.

I missed some of it because I had to confer with the clerk. In your motion, are you asking that we restart after the first hour with a first round of questions for six minutes? Is that in your motion or are you asking for that verbally?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Verbally.

The Chair: All right.

As regards the written motion, I think it's obvious everyone will agree that, when we ask for the tabling of...

[*English*]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): I'm sorry, Chair. This was just distributed, so it didn't have a notice of motion. It's being moved now outside the speaking order, and I'm not sure if that's procedurally—

The Chair: It's being moved as a point of order. It pertains to the subject matter at hand that we're dealing with, so it probably wouldn't even need notice. It's a very routine motion.

[*Translation*]

Can you repeat your motion Ms. Michaud?

You are asking, in fact, that the witnesses respect the...

[*English*]

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, if it's the subject matter at hand, it's not a point of order.

The Chair: Okay, so it's not a point of order per se and it can't be moved on a point of order, but Madame Michaud had the floor. Is that sufficient...?

Mr. Greg McLean: Madame Michaud raised a point of order and then started talking to the subject at hand, so it's out of order.

The Chair: Okay. I thought we could deal with this in a friendly manner, since it's pretty straightforward.

[Translation]

Ms. Michaud, let's recap. You are simply asking that when we request additional documents, that they be provided.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Absolutely.

It's as simple as that. It's for the benefit of all of my colleagues.

The Chair: Understood. You wish to move a formal motion.

[English]

Can we just agree unanimously that when we ask for documents, we expect that we'll get the documents at some point?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Chair, I don't think there are any issues. I'm just concerned that if we start going out of the agreed framework of committee proceedings, it goes down a path that can lead to—

• (1535)

The Chair: Okay. Just a second.

[Translation]

Ms. Michaud, I don't think anyone is objecting, but this is not a point of order. We would ask you to table your motion when it's your turn to speak.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

The Chair: Without further ado, I will give the floor to Mr. Corson for ten minutes.

[English]

Mr. Brad Corson (Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer, Imperial Oil Limited): Good afternoon, chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the invitation to be here today.

My name is Brad Corson. I am the chairman, president and CEO of Imperial. Joining me are Simon Younger, senior vice-president of Imperial's upstream operations, and Helga Shield, Imperial's environment, regulatory and socio-economic manager.

I'd like to acknowledge that we are meeting today in Ottawa on the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation. In this meeting today, and every day as we carry out our business, we do so on the traditional territories of first nations, Métis and Inuit, who have lived on and cared for these lands for generations. We are all entrusted with caring for the land, and that is a responsibility Imperial takes very seriously. We come today fully committed to our reconciliation journey.

I am deeply apologetic for what has happened at Kearl. We are committed to correcting the situation and ensuring it does not happen again.

Imperial strives to build strong and lasting relationships with indigenous communities based on mutual trust, respect and shared prosperity. We have broken this trust with these incidents and by failing in our commitment to provide sufficient communications to neighbouring indigenous communities. This communication breakdown has led to a significant amount of misinformation, which has contributed to fear, confusion and anger in these communities. I deeply regret that this has happened.

The process of rebuilding trust will take time, and it will require listening and learning. All of us at Imperial have dedicated ourselves to this important journey.

A core principle of Imperial's business is to operate in an environmentally responsible manner. We work tirelessly to do the right thing, and this situation is not reflective of how we operate and who we are as a company. We are disappointed in this recent performance. We can and will do better—I promise you that.

The two incidents being discussed today represent a failure to deliver superior environmental performance. This is our first environmental protection order at Kearl, which is one too many, and we want it to be our last. I, alongside all Canadians, expect Imperial to meet or exceed the environmental protection standards set by provincial and federal regulators.

I would like to reassure Canadians that we are working diligently to address these issues with the urgency they deserve.

I will now outline what happened and the steps Imperial is taking to clean up, act and communicate following the incidents at Kearl. We have provided a map of our operation to aid the committee in understanding the scope of the two incidents.

The first incident is related to seepage from the Kearl tailings containment system in four isolated areas near our lease boundary, covering a total area of about one hectare.

Last May we discovered pools of discoloured water. We proceeded to inform the Alberta Energy Regulator and local indigenous communities. Discoloured surface water can occur naturally in this region, and we shared with communities that we were investigating the source of this water.

Our investigation was complex and required multiple months of technical studies. Ultimately we determined that this discoloured surface water was made up of natural groundwater and precipitation along with some water that seeped from our operations. Throughout the investigation, we also determined there were no impacts to fish populations in nearby river systems or risks to drinking water for local communities.

• (1540)

The Kearl facility has an advanced seepage interception system that is designed to capture anticipated seepage from the tailings pond into subsurface groundwater. This is a regulatory requirement. Our investigations determined that the four surface pools resulted from seepage that occurred in shallower layers not captured by this system.

We completed all of our regulatory notifications and followed our established process with the indigenous communities for initial notification. However, our communication with indigenous communities fell short: We did not speak directly with the leaders and we did not provide regular updates. I'm sorry for that.

During subsequent meetings with community environment committees, we stated that the matter was still being investigated. We didn't want to go back to the communities until we fully understood the situation and had a finalized plan. However, we should have provided the indigenous communities with the same information we were giving the AER regarding the findings and planned mitigation measures. We recognize that this was a mistake and we have corrected it.

Addressing this situation was and is a priority for our company. There are over 200 people working on remediation efforts, which include expanding our seepage interception system with additional draining structures, pumping wells, permanent fencing to protect wildlife and increased water well and wildlife monitoring.

Regarding the second event, which is unrelated, earlier this year there was an overflow from a drainage pond at Kearnl, resulting in the release of 5,300 cubic metres of water. This pond collects water from surface water drainage systems and the seepage interception system.

As is standard policy, local indigenous communities and the Alberta Energy Regulator were informed of this release after it was detected. An environmental protection order was issued shortly thereafter. We profoundly regret this incident. It never should have happened. The water that overflowed quickly froze. All impacted snow and ice in the area were removed and Imperial continues to work with the AER on cleanup certification.

Water from the overflow did not enter any rivers, the closest being the Firebag River, which is approximately 2.5 kilometres away. Monitoring continues to show that there have been no impacts to local drinking water sources, and there is no indication of impacts to wildlife.

The overflow was caused by a combination of equipment problems and process failure. As a result, we are implementing measures on site to prevent an event like this from happening again.

I would like to reiterate that at Imperial, safety and protecting the environment are core values. That includes protecting our people, local communities and the environment.

Kearnl has a robust water monitoring program. We first started testing in the region in 2008, years before we began production. Recent tests continue to show that drinking water in the region is safe. However, we understand that this situation has contributed to a lack of trust, and communities continue to worry about their own safety and that of their families, friends and neighbours.

We want communities to feel safe and to know that they are heard. Over the last three months, we have met with leaders and environmental staff and have hosted in-community open house meetings. I have personally met with several chiefs and presidents to hear their concerns and to better understand their expectations of Imperial.

We have invited all communities to visit Kearnl to see our remediation efforts and to perform their own water sampling and monitoring, and the majority have done so. In addition, we responded immediately to community requests for drinking water for emergency backup purposes.

We recognize that the traditional lands on which we operate provide water, food and medicine for first nations and Métis communities in the region. We have heard their concerns, and we are very sorry.

● (1545)

I would like to conclude by expressing my sincere apologies again, on behalf of Imperial and all of our employees, for the two incidents that occurred and the related communication shortfalls. We must and we will do better. I can assure you that we are committed to restoring the trust we have broken.

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today. We look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Corson.

We'll go to the first six-minute round. I believe it's Ms. Goodridge who's leading off.

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

Thank you for that testimony. It was nice to hear the land acknowledgement at the beginning. I want to bring to the attention of everyone here that when you went to Fort Chipewyan and did a community town hall nearly a month after these events, you did not do that. You did not start with a prayer and you did not acknowledge the elders. That created a lot more frustration in my community and in the entire region.

I profoundly hope that you have learned a lesson. Going up for a one-hour town hall and not starting with a land acknowledgement and a prayer is not how we do things in northeastern Alberta. That is not how we do things. I hope that is a step towards doing things a little differently.

I was born and raised in the Fort McMurray area. I've lived there just about my entire life. My family has been very involved in oil sands development for three generations now, and I'm raising the fourth generation. This is home.

It was very concerning, because there was no information. There were weeks when there was a vacuum of information.

As part of doing my duties as a member of Parliament, I was in Fort Chipewyan on March 1 and February 28. At that time, I had elders telling me they didn't know what was going on but not to drink the water. That was the level of fear, and there was no water there.

I'm wondering whether you can tell us when you provided the community with water and when you provided the community, and the leadership in the community, with information surrounding the breaches.

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes. Thank you for that question.

First I want to comment on the land acknowledgement reference you made. That was a significant oversight on our part. I am disturbed that we did not do that at the beginning of the meeting. I will tell you that it is common practice for us, as a company, to routinely offer land acknowledgements at our meetings. I don't know the circumstances of that particular day, but it was wrong. We should have offered a land acknowledgement. We discussed that internally and we recognized that it was a mistake. We have raised very clear expectations on the importance of recognizing the land and the important relations we have with the Indigenous communities in all of our operations and all of our offices. Again, I'm apologetic for that, and I expect we will do better in the future.

With regard to the water issue itself, again, as we undertook a very rigorous testing process to understand the extent of this issue at Kearl, all of our sampling has confirmed that there has not been any impact to the drinking water supplies. However, to the point you made, the vacuum of information, the lack of our providing updates, created a lot of uncertainty in the communities—

• (1550)

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Not to interrupt—I'm sorry—but it didn't just create uncertainty; it created fear. The fear was real. It was palpable. I was up there. People were afraid, and I didn't have any more information for them. The municipality was doing its best. They didn't have any information.

It is worth highlighting that this was real. It was not just uncertainty; this was fear.

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes, fear was going to be my next word. There was uncertainty and fear.

It's horrible that it happened. I feel very sad that it happened. I place a high priority and a high value on those relationships. All of us, as individuals and as human beings...none of us want to be fearful of things as basic as water.

As soon as I, the management team and our organization became aware of that and that there was fear in the community, we immediately authorized providing drinking water. Again, that was despite the fact that we had data that said that the water was fine to drink. That didn't matter; it was all about fear—

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: I appreciate that, but the community didn't have the same information that you had. Therefore, it is kind of a moot point.

I'm going to move on. We heard some pretty damning testimony surrounding the communication and when different first nations got communication. It seemed that there wasn't consistency in when

certain first nations versus Métis versus different indigenous communities heard from Imperial and how they heard from Imperial.

I'm wondering if you would be comfortable tabling with committee the communications that you had so that we can see when the communications happened.

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes—

The Chair: We're over our time, but please answer that question, Mr. Corson. We'll then go to Mr. Weiler.

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes, we have an extensive log of all of the notifications and engagements that we had with the indigenous communities. We made initial notifications, I believe, on May 19. That was through our established processes with each of the communities and protocols to notify their environment committee.

As I said earlier, those communications fell short because they were not escalated to the leader.

The Chair: If I understood it correctly, what Mrs. Goodridge wanted to see was some documents of proof of communications and so on.

Go ahead, Mr. Weiler.

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes, we're happy to provide those.

The Chair: That's perfect. Thanks.

Ms. Helga Shield: We brought those today, and I'm happy to table them.

The Chair: That's perfect. Thank you.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank the witnesses for coming to speak here today and answering the many questions that we have on a process that we know has lost a lot of trust.

The first question I'd like to ask is.... The Alberta Energy Regulator maintains that in events like this, when there are these persistent seepages, it's the duty of the owner of the operation to inform the public. I'm wondering if you would agree with that statement.

Mr. Brad Corson: Certainly we want to be transparent with all of our stakeholders about our operations. We endeavour to provide the appropriate communications, especially as we have gathered more information. We have been making those available to all of the communities. We've been providing regular updates, not just to the AER; we've been posting those updates on our website so that information is available to everyone in the public.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Given that Imperial has known of the seepage taking place since at least May of last year, is there an estimate of how much of the water has actually seeped since then?

Mr. Brad Corson: We are still in the process of calculating the volumetric estimates. What I can tell you is that for the four seepage locations, the footprint, if you will, is about one hectare.

The reason there's a lot of complexity in the calculation is that it's more than calculating just the fluids that are on the surface; it also involves estimating the subsurface flow of water and fluids. That is a much more complex process. It's very transient and variable in nature. We're doing extensive modelling.

Again, what I can tell you today is that the footprint was about one hectare.

• (1555)

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you. It would be great to have that information, given that this has been going on for almost a year at this point.

We know that Imperial has met many times with the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation as well as the Mikisew Cree since the events took place in May of last year. Why did Imperial not notify either nation of the leakage of industrial wastewater? They are downstream in the watershed and they are drinking the water and eating the food that depends on the water.

Mr. Brad Corson: We care deeply about the relations with our indigenous communities, the first nations, the Métis and the communities you referred to. We did make initial notifications to those communities right from the outset.

Where we fell short and where we are improving our processes is that those notifications were only to the environment committees for those communities. Those notifications did not include the chiefs and the senior leadership of the community. That was a mistake on our part. Given the situation and the significance of the concern, we absolutely should have picked up the phone and spoken directly with the chiefs and the leadership, so we've corrected our process to ensure that it does not happen again.

Since then, as I mentioned in my statement, I have met with several of the chiefs and the presidents.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

If, in this case, the downstream community was a city like Calgary, do you think you would have notified the city?

Mr. Brad Corson: We would have followed the same process. It has nothing to do with what city is downstream or what community is downstream. We certainly feel an obligation to keep all of our stakeholders and all of our neighbouring communities aware and notified.

As I said, at the very beginning of the incidents, we did make a notification, but we failed in escalating that notification within those communities. Then we also failed in providing regular updates as time went on as we gathered more information about the incident. We provided that information to the AER, but we should have, in parallel, provided it to the indigenous communities. We will do that in the future. We're doing that on a regular basis now.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

You mentioned that your testing shows that there was no impact to wildlife, fish or drinking water; however, your own investigation, which was shared with the Alberta Energy Regulator in August of 2022, found samples of contamination that exceeded the environmental guidelines for things like iron, arsenic, hydrocarbons and sulphites. The Alberta Energy Regulator mentioned that hydro-

carbons and naphthenic acids were found in a fish-bearing lake. We know that the nations have taken pictures of wildlife tracks leading into the lease area.

Given that indigenous groups have been kept entirely in the dark of the impacts that you found, why should local communities, indigenous groups or Canadians writ large have any faith in your assessment that there's no impact to wildlife, fish or drinking water?

Mr. Brad Corson: The information that we gathered right from the beginning confirms that there have been no adverse impacts. There have been some excursions in the data, but often that can be attributed to variations in background levels. We are committed to gathering extensive data and ensuring that the situation is accurate and that we continue to not have an impact on fish populations or wildlife.

We have employed contractors that are partly indigenous-owned to perform assessments in the area of the seepage from a wildlife impact standpoint and a vegetation impact standpoint, and then separate water monitoring. Those results continue to support the statements I made.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before you start my time, I would like you to answer the question I asked a little earlier. Can we proceed as though we have two different panels so that we have the same speaking time during each hour?

• (1600)

The Chair: Personally, I'm sticking with the motion that the Committee passed at the beginning of the parliament. So after the second round, it will be a third round of five minutes and two and a half minutes.

If the committee agrees with your proposal, we could do it, but I see that the Conservatives do not agree. There does not seem to be any interest either on the Liberal side. I will therefore stick to the existing formula. Unfortunately, this is my decision.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: That's fine, thank you.

Since it's my turn to speak, I will take the opportunity to move the motion I tried to move earlier. That was my mistake. I did not know that we could not move a motion on a point of order.

Since Ms. Goodridge has asked the witnesses to table documents, I assume the Conservatives will support my motion. It has been distributed to the members of the committee, but I will read it again.

I move that:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the Committee require that any requests for documentation made to witnesses be complied with and that a copy be provided no later than 5:00 p.m. on Friday, May 5, 2023.

The Chair: Are we agreed?

(The motion was agreed to).

The Chair: Congratulations, your motion was adopted.

You now have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

As you may have heard earlier, I'm filling in for my colleague, who is the environment critic for our party, but I'm the climate change critic for our party, so this is an issue that I'm very interested in. I am very concerned about what has happened in Alberta, so thank you for coming forward and explaining it to us. The people who are affected by these events deserve an explanation.

Mr. Corson, I heard a lot of apologies in your opening remarks, a mea culpa, and a willingness to do better next time. You seem to blame it mostly on a lack of communication. Perhaps you don't take enough responsibility for the events. In this sense, I wonder if you consider that your company has a legal and moral responsibility towards the communities that suffer the consequences of this technical irresponsibility.

Do you or do you not consider that you have a moral and legal obligation? If so, what agreements do you rely on? Are there any agreements or internal documents that prove this? Do you have agreements with the different communities that give you this responsibility, but also the responsibility to inform them when events such as those that have happened in the last few months occur?

[English]

Mr. Brad Corson: Thank you for the question and for your comments.

First I would acknowledge your statement that people deserve an explanation of this situation. That's why I'm happy to be here today. I want to share our understanding of the situation; our plans as we go forward; our apology, of course, right from the outset; and especially our commitment to learn from this, to do better and to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

We do take responsibility for the notification process. I am deeply saddened and apologetic that we did not fulfill the moral obligations we have with these very important indigenous communities. We have spent decades building relations with these indigenous communities. It's horrible that we have shattered the trust with them. We want to do everything we can to rebuild it. We have agreements with each of the neighbouring communities around communication protocols, ongoing engagements and consultations. As I mentioned earlier, although we made some initial notifications, we fell short in the spirit of those agreements and those expectations. That's what we're working hard to rebuild. We're committed to it.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you for your answer.

I imagine that you suspected this would make the relationship with the communities rather difficult, if you did not discuss it directly with community leaders. I can imagine that it crossed your mind.

My question is fairly straightforward: why did you not simply share the information with them in a timely manner?

• (1605)

[English]

Mr. Brad Corson: Well, we certainly are giving them the information now. We fell short for the period while we were still investigating the situation. We wanted to have a more definitive plan. We were gathering data. There was nothing concerning in that data, per se, but we were fully analyzing the situation. It was always our intent, once we fully understood the situation and the source of the seepage, and once we understood and had approval from the AER around the mitigation plans, to share that whole story and that whole process with the communities.

We should have walked them through the learning process as we were gathering data. That data validated that there was no damage or threat to the water supplies or fish populations or wildlife. We should have been sharing that, but we didn't. That was a big mistake, and we've learned from that mistake. We've corrected our processes. I'm confident that this situation will never happen again.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I sincerely hope so.

In your opening remarks, you said that your investigation determined that there was no impact on fish populations in neighbouring river systems or risk to the drinking water of local communities. Earlier, Ms. Goodridge described quite well the sense of fear that communities have had and still have about drinking tap water.

For his part, Chief Allan Adam said he asked his community members to throw away all the game meat they had and that he would not even feed it to dogs. This is what he said in a CBC article. They were furious to learn that the land they farmed or hunted on might have been contaminated.

How can you say for sure that there was no adverse effect on the environment? Do you have any samples? Did your investigation determine with certainty that there was no risk to human health?

The Chair: You are well over your time.

Mr. Corson, please give us a brief five or ten second response. We can't get into the heart of the matter unless you answer the question during another member's speaking time.

[English]

Mr. Brad Corson: We've continued to do analyses on the area. We've hired third parties to come in and perform independent analyses. They continue to conclude that there is no risk, or minimal risk, of any wildlife impacts.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much for being here today and for providing this testimony to us.

Thank you for apologizing. That is certainly important to do.

As an Albertan, as a member of Parliament, and as someone who sat and listened to the testimony of Chief Adams, I'm angry. I'm angry at Imperial Oil, I'm angry at the provincial government, I'm angry at the federal government, and I'm angry at the AER, because you all failed that community.

What you're saying to me, sir, is that there were no adverse impacts. We've all described to you some of the adverse impacts. There certainly were adverse impacts. You have lost the trust to be able to say that we should trust anything you bring forward. You've broken the trust that you have with those communities. You'll forgive all of us in this room for treating all of your testimony with a great degree of skepticism.

You met with representatives of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation at the environment management committee three times last summer and fall. You met with them on July 21, September 15 and November 18, and the toxic seepage was never brought up.

You talked about the fact that on May 19 you let them know. On May 19 you said there was discoloured water and vegetation. You never said that these were tailings or that it was toxic sludge that had come up. You had an opportunity to bring this up three times and to say you had worries and concerns about it. You didn't bring it up at all.

Can you explain why on three occasions, meeting with an environmental management committee, your company failed to even raise it?

• (1610)

Mr. Brad Corson: Again, our communication processes did fail in that regard. When we made the initial notifications of discoloured water, the source of that discoloured water was unclear. We know that in the Athabasca watershed region, discoloured orange water, which is representative of high levels of iron, is naturally occurring. We needed to perform more investigations, and that's what we communicated initially to those environment committees.

It took—

Ms. Heather McPherson: You said you were going to follow up with them, but you never did follow up with them. Even during their annual tailings management review sessions, indigenous communities pointed out evidence suggesting that the tailings ponds in question were seeping beyond their seepage interception system as early as 2020. As recently as November 2022, indigenous representatives asked for an update.

In November 2022, if you didn't have the information six months in, sir, and if you didn't have any inclination that there may be a concern there six months in, I find that very difficult to believe. At the time, you failed to mention lateral seepage occurring from the tailings ponds or the notice of non-compliance which you had received from the AER in September. You were clearly trying to hide information from indigenous communities. Isn't that true?

Mr. Brad Corson: No, it's not. We have never been trying to hide any information. We were negligent in not proactively sharing information that we had, but we never have been trying to hide any information.

I do understand that we have lost a lot of trust. I recognize that creates skepticism for what we say, including today, but I would just ask that you let our actions going forward and the data we provide going forward determine the results of this situation. We have made conscious decisions to change our processes and our communication and to be very transparent with all of the data that's available. We're going to continue to do that as we go forward.

I cannot change what has happened in the past. It was wrong. I'm very apologetic for it and I'm not happy with it, but I can change what we do going forward, and that's what we are doing.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Sir, we've had a lot of questions about how you communicate with indigenous and Métis groups, which is obviously very important, but I think we also have some questions about the environmental disaster that is ongoing. I mean, it is not just communicating that something terrible is happening; it's dealing with the terrible thing that has happened, of course.

Regarding the statement you made about the discoloured water, the discoloured water pooled up to the surface at four locations, but that doesn't address the extent of the leak below ground. What are the concentrations of contaminants that are in the leak below ground, not just in the water that made it up to the surface?

Mr. Brad Corson: I'm glad you asked about the kinds of the actions we're taking, because we are taking significant actions to address the subsurface seepage. Over the last few months, we have drilled 140 wells that will allow us to monitor the water quality across that whole area. As part of those 140 wells, we have drilled wells that allow us pump the water out of those subsurface layers and recycle it back into our process. We've installed—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Sir, I'm going to run out of time. I'm sorry. I don't want to interrupt you, but I did ask what the concentration of contaminants was in the subsurface water.

Mr. Brad Corson: Well, we've taken over a thousand samples over the last several months. That's an extensive amount of data. I don't have all those specific data points—

Ms. Heather McPherson: You don't know how much concentration of contaminants there is in the underwater seepage.

Mr. Brad Corson: We have provided all that information on our website. We've provided it to the communities. We've provided it to the AER. If there's a desire, we can provide it to this committee as well—

• (1615)

Ms. Heather McPherson: There's a desire.

Mr. Brad Corson: I just don't have it available to me right now.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. McLean for five minutes.

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

Thank you for being here.

There is one piece of information that we've heard before—and you've said it again, Mr. Corson—about the information that you provided at the initial seepage. You've said that you gave it to the environmental committees of the indigenous organizations. The indigenous organizations that were here on Monday said that it was only a rumour they had received.

Will you have in your documentation the actual communication that you provided to those environmental committees or those indigenous organizations?

Mr. Brad Corson: We can certainly provide documentation of those notifications if there is a desire to receive it.

Mr. Greg McLean: Thank you.

I think I'm going to concentrate my questions on Ms. Shield now, because this does look like a failure of process and communication. It looks like it's in her responsibilities. It looks like her job here.

It was three months from the time in May 2022 when this initial seepage came out until your chemistry was actually showing that this was industrial water in August. That's three months when people were hesitant about their own water. Do you think a better communication plan could have been had in making sure that people were informed on a daily basis about your testing of the water that they bathe in and that they drink?

Ms. Helga Shield (Manager, Environment, Regulatory and Socioeconomic, Imperial Oil Limited): Thank you.

If I could go back in time, we would do things very differently. We would do them as we're doing them now.

Since the environmental protection order was issued to us in February, we've had over 300 contacts with those communities. We've shared over 50 reports. We're logging all those calls. We have shared all the information that has gone to the AER, both in summary report and in the data spreadsheets themselves. Every time we give notice to government, it goes to those indigenous communities at the same time. I think that will become our new normal.

Mr. Greg McLean: It wasn't normal until now to give people assurances that the water they use on a daily basis is safe when you have an industrial spill. Is this what you're telling me?

Ms. Helga Shield: I think we had no indication that there was a concern with the drinking water. That's really what drove the decisions.

Mr. Greg McLean: There was an industrial seepage that had the possibility of getting into people's water. Do you think that the course should have been to make sure that there was enough testing to make sure that it did not get into people's water and give them the assurance that when they have a shower, when they bathe their children, when they drink the water or cook with the water, it's safe water?

Ms. Helga Shield: Absolutely. Any time we have some activity that may have an impact off our site or may have an impact on local

communities, I agree that we should be sharing that information, and we will do that.

Mr. Greg McLean: I hope something comes out of this that has a responsibility and accountability mechanism going forward.

I want to concentrate in my next set of questions on your relationship with the Alberta Energy Regulator because it appears, from the timeline we have, that you notified them about the spill in March. It looks as though all they did was put it on their website for other people to get that information from their website. There was no direct contact, from what we've seen, with indigenous organizations about the spill, not the seepage.

Obviously, an event happened here that was beyond whatever should have happened, yet nobody, neither you nor the AER, reached out and told people that there was something very serious going on. How do you think that should have happened?

Ms. Helga Shield: I think that when the notification went to the AER, there was a reach out to the environmental staff of the communities. We started offering leader-to-leader meetings very shortly thereafter. After the first week, we shared the initial response plans that had been submitted to the AER. Within a week, we began weekly updates to communities. On Wednesday, we issued our tenth. Those go out every Wednesday afternoon.

Mr. Greg McLean: Okay, thank you.

I have one final question—I only have a few minutes—that I need to get answered. It's on the issue around intergovernmental responsibility here, because the Government of the Northwest Territories was expecting an indication from the Government of Alberta when such an incident happened, and it received none. The Alberta government apparently didn't know about this, even from the Alberta Energy Regulator, a quasi-judicial body, until the same time that the federal government—Environment and Climate Change Canada—received notice.

Is there no reporting mechanism to make sure that all these governmental bodies are informed when an incident like this happens?

• (1620)

Ms. Helga Shield: We report to what is called the EDGE hotline. It's a 1-800 number. It's open 24-7. The expectation is that when we call EDGE, the fan-out process starts at that point.

The Chair: You're out of time.

We'll go now to Ms. Thompson.

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming.

Obviously this is a very difficult conversation to have, and I can tell you that on Monday the testimony we heard was incredibly disturbing. Certainly it was communication, but it's every aspect of people's lives. The fear was very difficult to witness.

I want to really stress the mental health impact on the witnesses who were here, and I can only imagine—I probably can't imagine—what it's like in families and in communities. I want to very clearly say that this is certainly communication, but it's much more than that. It's environmental. It's about people's lives.

As an organization, what are you planning to do now to help mitigate what's happening in people's lives? I'm going to use the word “compensate”, because it's about supports now, whether for mental health or business. There were other very real concerns around cancers and other health concerns. As a company, how do you plan to address them within the communities?

Mr. Brad Corson: Thanks for asking that.

These are real concerns. I agree with your statement. I watched the testimony on Monday myself, all two hours and 40 minutes of it. I was deeply troubled and saddened by the stories I heard.

It pains me deeply to experience what we're all going through together, with the impacts that we've had on these very important indigenous communities. They are our neighbours. They've entrusted their land to us, and we have a responsibility. I feel horrible with what has happened.

We are working very hard to rebuild that trust. That's why, as Helga and I mentioned, we've had several ongoing engagements with them. We want to work with each of those communities to make this situation right. We want to help rebuild trust. We know that there are mental health impacts. We know there are other concerns. We want to engage them, community by community, to fully understand what those issues are and what we can do to make things better so that we can rebuild trust and go forward as strong partners in this relationship. It will take time, but we are committed to it.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: To that end, I want to go back to the drinking water, because I think the environmental reality is incredibly important for this conversation.

I believe samples were provided on April 15, 2023, but clearly there must have been a series of water samples that you received. I didn't hear on Monday that any of the witnesses who were present had those records in hand. Were they provided? Do you have a log of the water samples—both the subsurface layers and the drinking water?

The environmental impact needs to be addressed. That needs to be a very tangible conversation.

I'm wondering about the data and the records. How often did those reports come to your desk and where are they, so that communities in particular can see them? I think it's also important for this committee.

Mr. Brad Corson: We have provided an extensive amount of data to the communities. Admittedly, it's been more recently and not early on in the process.

I will ask Helga to talk very specifically about the nature of the reports we're providing and the frequency, because there are many reports.

Ms. Helga Shield: As I said, we did bring a log. We are happy to share that with the committee.

We have shared all of that water information with those communities. We have spoken with—

● (1625)

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Excuse me for one second. What are the timelines? Is it just for April 2023, or do you have the data over the past number of months?

Ms. Helga Shield: We've provided the data over the past number of months as well as several years prior, so they can see background information as well. We are working with communities by providing capacity to support them in being able to undertake technical reviews of that data.

If I could, I want to step back to an earlier piece of your question. We've been talking a lot about indigenous communities and the company working in this space. Over 1,100 of our workers at Imperial are indigenous.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Corson, I noticed in your opening remarks that you talked a lot about water as if it was fairly harmless. However, chemical analyses submitted to the Alberta Energy Regulator in August 2022 showed that the samples contained concentrations of certain substances that exceeded the guidelines set out by the Department of the Environment and the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, among others. These included dissolved iron, total arsenic, fraction 2 hydrocarbons, sulphate and total sulphide.

Do you agree with me that, in this case, we should call a spade a spade? We should be talking about potentially toxic substances, not just water.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Corson: We're attempting to be very transparent with all the data that we find. Relative to those specific tests, we acknowledge that there are tests in the area of the seep locations that show exceedances relative to established guidelines.

When I talk about no harm to drinking water or the river systems, I'm talking about separate samples that have been taken at the Firebag River or at the Athabasca River, which on an ongoing basis show no deviations from the normal baseline for those water bodies.

We do have situations much closer to where the seeps occurred where there are exceedances, but not where there are actual river systems. That's the clarification.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

I would like to come back to the analysis that was done.

Did the Alberta Energy Regulator received sampling records on a regular basis between May 2022 and April 2023?

[English]

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes, we've provided extensive data to the AER. Again I might defer to Helga to comment more specifically on the nature and frequency of the reports.

Ms. Helga Shield: Certainly any water sampling data that was provided to the AER has now been provided to communities—all of it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. McPherson is next.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Is drainage pond 4 still leaking into off-lease land?

Mr. Brad Corson: No, it's not. We have cleaned it up.

At the time that overflow incident happened, that water froze almost immediately, so we have cleaned all that up. We're waiting on the AER to confirm the final certification that the cleanup is complete, based on the soil samples we've taken, but that pond is not leaking.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Are toxic tailing fluids still being pumped into the leaking reservoirs as we speak?

Mr. Brad Corson: I'm not sure I completely understand your question. Could you restate it?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Are toxic tailings still being pumped into the reservoirs that have been leaking?

Mr. Brad Corson: The tailings ponds that we use are designed with recognition that some level of seepage could and can occur. As a result, we had installed, right from the beginning, an extensive—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Are you still using them, though? Are you still putting tailings into those ponds?

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes, we are. It's an integral part of our operation, but as I mentioned earlier, we've expanded that seepage interception system to address the seepage that we've identified.

• (1630)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Are you trying to say that there is some level of seepage that is acceptable and that is still happening?

Mr. Brad Corson: There is recognition that seepage can occur on an ongoing basis, but we have designed a system that has wells around the perimeter of the tailings ponds that will collect that seepage before it leaves our lease.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I think we can all agree that it should contain it before it leaves the lease. That didn't happen.

You initially estimated the overflow spill at 2,000 litres. You then revised that number to 5.3 million litres. Is that number of 5.3 million litres accurate, or did more toxic tailings still spill from that? Is that still an increasing number?

Mr. Brad Corson: No. We believe that's an accurate number.

The source of the—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Is that accurate as to the day, or accurate as of today? As of today, is 5.3 million litres accurate?

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes.

We didn't estimate it at 2,000 litres. The reason it was that to begin with was that the reporting guidelines require us to report something that is 2,000 litres or greater. When we made an initial notification, it was in recognition that we had a spill that was 2,000 litres or greater. It was registered as 2,000 in the system, but we knew right from the outset that we had to go through a quantification exercise, and that's why you see it as 5,300.

Ms. Heather McPherson: You meant 5.3 million litres.

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you for coming to the committee.

As has been mentioned by everyone today, there are some concerns and certainly the need to see trust restored.

My question, Mr. Corson, is this: What is being done since we heard—and from what I understand you and your organization have heard—that the trust has been broken, damaged and needs to be restored? What work are you doing to ensure that trust gets restored?

Mr. Brad Corson: Certainly trust is much more than words and statements. Trust is defined by actions, so we are very much focused on actions with all of our indigenous communities. We have made significant adjustments in our communication of protocols. We're being very transparent and providing regular updates to the communities. We are meeting with members of those communities, across their organizations at all levels, including at my level, and we're going into the communities and offering, if you will, town halls and open houses.

Similarly, we've invited all of the communities to come to Kearn so that they can see the incidents first-hand. They can see the mitigation steps we're taking. We've offered for them to take their own water samples in order to help them build confidence, if that's what it takes.

Through all of those actions and a further demonstration of our commitment to this relationship, we hope we will rebuild trust. Trust is something that takes a long time to build. I use the analogy of a very intricate piece of crystal artwork that could take hours, days, weeks and months to build, and then in one misstep, you drop it and it shatters. It then takes day, months and years to rebuild. That's where we are. We dropped it and it shattered, and now we're going to invest all the time and commitment it takes to rebuild it. This is critically important to us as an organization.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you.

I want to dig down into your reference to the testing, which you also mentioned in your opening remarks, and ensuring that there is accountability and an understanding. This is because we hear—and I hear it, as a member of Parliament who represents a ton of energy production, mostly in traditional oil and gas—a ton of misinformation that comes out about the industry in general. However, I want to really dig down into the testing.

You mentioned just a moment ago that you're allowing indigenous communities and local stakeholders to do water testing. You mentioned in your opening remarks that you have contracts with indigenous organizations that are doing that testing. Can you dig down into some of the specifics of what that looks like? I think you mentioned 140 wells where you were able to pump out water to both test the water and mitigate some of the challenges.

Can you dig into exactly what that looks like, and whether or not communities in the area can trust that there is no contamination affecting their health?

• (1635)

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes, we added 140 wells, so now we have approximately 350 wells. Of those 350, I think about 55 are specifically designed to pump water out from the subsurface. As seepage occurs and approaches those particular wells that are intended to protect and ensure that groundwater that's affected by seepage does not leave our lease, those 55 wells pump it back into our system for processing.

The balance of those wells, just shy of 300, are used for monitoring. We have a very rigorous process to collect data from each of those wells on a very regular basis. I can ask Helga to comment on the frequency. I believe some are monthly and some are quarterly, but—

The Chair: We're a bit over time, so we'll go to Mr. Longfield. You can always provide the answer in response to someone else's question.

Go ahead, Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the representatives from Imperial for being here today.

Thank you also for following the testimony on Monday, which was incredibly powerful testimony, particularly relating to the health issues. In fact, Chief Adam has a father-in-law who is currently being diagnosed with a rare cancer. The impacts on those communities, both in physical health and in mental health....

Also on Monday, Minister Guilbeault proposed that a joint federal-provincial-indigenous working group with participation from the oil companies be established. This is not to replace the existing Crown-indigenous working group on the potential oil sands mining effluent regulations, which continues its important work.

Could you comment on its importance, or whether you would see this as a positive move to get everybody at the table? Chief Adam started his testimony by saying, "We're done with all the pointing of fingers. We need to solve the problem together."

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes. I haven't seen all of the details of what Minister Guilbeault proposed, but the concept of bringing stakeholders together—government regulators, indigenous communities and industry—to work to improve the communication process, to improve the management of tailings for this industry, I think is a positive. I would support participating in such an undertaking.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great. Thank you very much.

Beyond communicating, we have the existing physical locations of tailings ponds.

You have 27 operations in Alberta and the Northwest Territories. With regard to the process improvements on Kearl, is that going to happen simultaneously with the other operations so that we include the indigenous people? We heard in our testimony on Monday that the indigenous people weren't allowed on site during water testing. Now we're hearing that they are.

Mr. Brad Corson: They certainly have been invited on site, and many of them have participated.

Imperial participates in several industry organizations and industry networks so that we can share the learnings of this particular incident. We have one tailings pond that is the subject here. I'm not familiar with the details of all of them in industry. However, again, we are participating in several mechanisms to share the learnings.

I might ask Simon Younger, who is closer to those details, whether he wants to make some comments.

• (1640)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I appreciate that. If he could do it in writing, it would be helpful. I have only a few minutes left.

You mentioned other sites. In Sydney, Nova Scotia, 600,000 litres were spilled. It's not just Alberta, but it's also, as you said, an industry concern. To that end, I'm wondering about cleanup of the water using new technologies. The University of Guelph is working on nanoparticles and aeration systems. There is other work being done around electrodes.

How are you integrating the research from the universities into cleaning up the water that's in the tailings ponds right now?

Mr. Brad Corson: Technology plays a very important role for our industry. Imperial established the first research organization for this industry several decades ago. As a company, over the last 20 years we have spent roughly \$2 billion on research. That continues to be a high priority for us.

We also were a founding member of COSIA, an industry organization that focuses on research and technology developments, with an extreme focus on tailings.

We are actively involved in the pursuit of better approaches to managing these tailings ponds.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Is there anything happening now? Can you see some progress? Is there any example that you can give us?

Mr. Brad Corson: I don't know whether I have any very specific examples, given the time we have. These are complex matters. However, we are continuing to look at additional ways to treat the water and to manage the water, and that process continues.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go back to Mr. McLean now for five minutes.

A voice: We're going back to Ms. Goodridge.

The Chair: Oh, I see. Go ahead, Laila.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: No worries. Thank you.

I want to clarify something. Regarding the original request I had regarding communications, you said you had logs. I believe that Mr. McLean asked for the actual testimony. I would like the content of the communications so that we can see it.

I also want to ensure that it includes the local municipality. While Fort Chipewyan is a predominantly indigenous community, there are non-indigenous people who live in that area. As well, it is the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo that operates the water treatment plant. The regional municipality operates a lot of those pieces. If that isn't included, I want to ensure that we're also including them. That's important for me.

Can you confirm that's part of...?

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes, we had extensive engagements with the municipality. Ultimately, they declared that the drinking water is safe. We're happy to share with you the engagements we've had with them.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: That would be great.

There's one big question that's still in the community, especially in response to the town hall that didn't really go well, and that's being very polite. There are still a lot of questions and a lot of people who want to share their concerns, their fears and their thoughts.

Is there a willingness on the part of Imperial to go back to Fort Chipewyan to have a more extensive town hall, not limiting it to just an hour but staying until people have said their piece?

Mr. Brad Corson: Thanks for asking.

We obviously learned a lot in that town hall. We went there not just to share information but also to listen and to understand concerns. Understandably, a lot of anger was expressed. It goes back to what you and others have raised, which is that there is a lot of fear

and lack of trust. These are things that are very personal to them and to the community.

It was a very difficult town hall, but we are very committed to continuing those engagements, which maybe there are already plans for. I might ask Helga, who's coordinating that for us, to comment.

• (1645)

Ms. Helga Shield: We've put forward a proposed schedule to each of the seven communities in the last week or two. We want to work with them to understand what would work best for them.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Can you list which seven communities?

Ms. Helga Shield: Sure.

In Fort Chipewyan, it's Athabasca Chipewyan, Mikisew and the Métis group. There are the first nation group and the Métis group out of Fort McKay, and the first nation group and the Métis group out of Fort McMurray, which are the 468 and 1935.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Will there be a general town hall and engagement in the city of Fort McMurray for non-indigenous people who also—shocker—do traditional harvesting and hunt and fish on those same lands?

Ms. Helga Shield: I think our goal is to work with communities and understand what forums work best for them, so we've put forward a proposal. We're seeking feedback on what forum works the best and we'll go forward from there.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: If there's one piece of advice I could possibly give you, it's don't let perfect be the enemy of good. Sooner rather than later is probably going to serve you in the long term.

I think that's possibly one of the biggest lessons learned in all of this. There was such a vacuum of information that it led to rumours and to an immense amount of fear. That fear went far beyond just the borders of these communities. This has rippled into other communities. There are ACFN members and Mikisew members who live all across the country who were fearful and scared for their family members.

There are people all across my area who make their living in this industry and are proud of the work that this industry has done. They were questioning what they've been doing because for the first time in a long time, they were really let down. It's nice to hear you here saying you're sorry. It would be nice to see you in all of the different communities doing the same thing.

The Chair: There are 10 seconds left, so we'll tack it on to the next time.

Mr. McLeod is next.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to Imperial for presenting today. I certainly appreciate hearing you.

My name is Michael McLeod. I'm the MP for the Northwest Territories. I'm from the region called the Dehcho. I belong to the Dehcho First Nations. I'm Métis. We're recognized as the "big river people". In the aboriginal language, "dehcho" means "big river". We've always had concerns about what has gone on upstream, from the time the first logging operations started and farms and everything else put stuff in the waterways, because we're downstream from it.

I appreciate hearing you talk about being concerned and about how people deserve an explanation, but for years and years the north has not had input into what's going on in the Alberta regulatory system, as you probably know. With what's happening now with the leaks from the tailing ponds, people are very concerned. I'm hearing lots of comments and getting calls.

As you said, we need to restore the trust. I think you know as well as I do that indigenous people do not trust government—any level of government—and they certainly do not trust oil companies. If we're going to make any headway moving forward, I think the actions will determine how we rebuild the trust. Many things have to happen, but because we can't get any information and Imperial has not reached out into the Northwest Territories, I think that will be difficult.

I grew up on the Mackenzie River, or the Dehcho. I swam in the river. I drank water from the river. I hunted on that river. I'm very concerned, as is every community down the Mackenzie Valley. Would Imperial Oil support having a meeting in the Northwest Territories to talk about your operations, talk about your future plan, talk about this breach and talk about a cleanup and about whether they'd provide the financial support to have that happen?

That's my first question.

• (1650)

Mr. Brad Corson: Thanks for the question.

We have great respect for the people of the Northwest Territories. It's unfortunate that the information hasn't been made available to you. As I've said, we want to be very transparent with what we've learned from this incident, transparent with the ongoing data that we're gathering and our plans to correct the situation as we go forward, so we would be happy to engage with you in making that information available. I'd take your guidance as to the best way to do that. If there is a desire to have a meeting, we would entertain that.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you. I appreciate that answer.

I think we really have to look at a number of things in order to move forward. First are some of the short-term actions, such as this. I think the minister has made some good decisions about a working group. As you've indicated, we certainly can't change what happened in the past, but as I sit here and listen to people talking about how they've done their part, everybody seems to be kind of passing it off, in a way, to somebody else, whether it's communication, whether it's testing or whether it's research. That seems to be the

norm when it comes to dealing with what's happening in Alberta and how things are being treated.

I worry a lot about cumulative effects, because everything that goes in the water, whether it's in B.C. or Alberta, comes right past my doorstep. Now that the minister is looking at this, and you've indicated that you support it and you think it's positive and you're willing to do more, would you be willing to participate in a cumulative effects study, if that was something that came about?

The Chair: Be brief, please, because we're over time.

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes, certainly we're happy to participate in a study. I think that anything that can improve understanding and build confidence in our communities regarding the impacts of our industry is a positive thing. We support participating.

The Chair: Madame Michaud, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Last Monday, Chief Adam said that even after two months of front-page reporting, they still don't know exactly what happened. As far as they know, no one has been fired and no disciplinary action or penalties have been imposed, either by the companies or the government.

That is indeed what we are seeing. Mr. Corson, in your opening remarks, you said that you felt you had a certain responsibility to protect the environment. We know that the extraction, production and consumption of oil and gas involve risks of leakage and represent fairly significant dangers for the environment. Do you think that regulations for the oil and gas industry should be more stringent? You said:

I, alongside all Canadians, expect Imperial to meet or exceed the environmental protection standards set by provincial and federal regulators.

Are we to understand that you agree with increased regulation and Imperial's adherence to those standards, as well as being willing to accept responsibility for leaks like the one we experienced?

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes, there are a couple of comments that I would make.

First of all, we have great respect for both the federal and the provincial regulators. We certainly endeavour to follow all regulations and not just meet those standards but exceed those standards.

In terms of whether we have the right level of regulation, I think that's a question for the federal regulators and the provincial regulators to assess.

What I would say is that I have spent nearly 40 years in this industry and I've worked all around the globe. My experience is that Canada has some of the strictest regulations anywhere in the world. That doesn't mean they can't be better, and we should continue to endeavour to make them better and make them the best they can be, but I want to just provide the perspective that we have a very strong foundation here.

• (1655)

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses, again, for their testimony.

Mr. Corson, you said at the beginning of your testimony that you're disappointed in your performance. You're disappointed in the performance of Imperial Oil.

We know that Imperial Oil lists, and this is a direct quote, “safety, health, and environmental performance” first in the list of business performance measures that it considers when determining compensation.

Imperial Oil has said that it—and I quote again—“Delivered strong safety performance and effective enterprise risk management” and “Demonstrated clear commitment to sustainability” in 2022. That was part of how it was determined that you would be able to double your salary. It was reported in *The Globe and Mail* today that in 2022 your salary doubled to \$17.34 million annually.

Do you feel that your performance met the standard of “demonstrated clear commitment to sustainability”? Do you feel that your performance “delivered strong safety performance and effective enterprise risk management”?

Mr. Brad Corson: First, I haven't seen the article you refer to.

With respect to those principles and those values, those are the guiding principles of our company. We consistently strive to perform at the highest level of safety and environmental performance. That is core to who we are as a company.

This particular incident is a big disappointment for us. We are learning from it. We're going to improve as we go forward.

I think there are many examples of positive things we've done, as we've established the best—

Ms. Heather McPherson: We're not here necessarily to listen to the positive examples. I think we're all here very much because of the negative examples. If you were to ask any of the first nations and Métis communities impacted by the Kearl spill, they may suggest that \$17.3 million a year is inappropriate for the performance that you have provided for Imperial Oil.

I have one other question for you. You knew that the location of this particular tailings pond was prone to seepage. The berm is constructed of porous materials. There are at least four seeps in the evidence of seepage being detected beyond the seepage interception system. Given these problems and that future incidents are possible, if not likely, do you believe that this is still a safe structure?

The Chair: Respond briefly, please, Mr. Corson.

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes, I do believe it is a safe structure. We have built the tailings pond to all of the appropriate construction standards. We have installed all of these wells, as I mentioned, and we will be monitoring the data from those wells on an ongoing basis. We have confidence in the structure.

The Chair: Mr. McLean is next.

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

There's one aspect that I didn't fully understand from my last round of questioning. The initial seepage was discovered on May 19, 2022, and you weren't aware of the chemistry until August 16, 2022. What takes so long in understanding the composition of your industrial water that's been released through seepage?

That's open to anybody who can give me a technical answer.

Mr. Brad Corson: I'll ask Simon to comment on that.

Mr. Simon Younger (Senior Vice-President, Upstream, Imperial Oil Limited): I'd be happy to provide a bit more information there. Thanks, Brad.

To give you a bit more of a sense of the timeline in how we investigated the seepage incident after the first discovery of the discoloured water in the—

Mr. Greg McLean: Quickly, please, Mr. Younger, what takes three months?

Mr. Simon Younger: As an example, one of the things we had to do was undertake a geochemistry study. We had to drill a series of monitoring wells. The geochemistry study took about five months. We drew up a series of monitoring wells. That was all directed at identifying the source of—

Mr. Greg McLean: I've only got so much time here, Mr. Younger, so I'm going to ask a direct question.

In testing water, what took three months to determine what this water was made of?

• (1700)

Mr. Simon Younger: As I just explained, it's a very complex question of source and pathway and understanding the geochemistry of what we were measuring from the monitoring wells—

Mr. Greg McLean: Let me move on, please.

I'm having an issue here with regard to the responsibility for communication to everybody—to the public and obviously to the indigenous bands that were there. I've got a muddle right now. I'm getting responses from this panel that are different from the ones I got from the panel that presented earlier this week. I imagine I might get different responses from the panel that will present next week.

What I want to know, out of this muddle...We're going to have to come up with communication clarity that shows there's confidence in this system going forward and that you can continue to operate without people literally looking over their shoulders about whether their water is safe or not.

Part of what we're looking at here is a mix-up between governments, or between parts of government, as in Alberta's case. The Government of Alberta didn't find out about this until the Government of Canada found out about it. The AER wasn't reporting, it seems, to the Government of Alberta on time. There does seem to be a lack of communication ability.

Ms. Shield, you talked about this EDGE and your responsibility to put it to EDGE. Do you know if there's a communication standard from there about where it goes as far as the various other government bodies are concerned, because I'm telling you, something here failed?

Ms. Helga Shield: I'm sorry. I can't speak about the Alberta regulator, which runs EDGE.

Mr. Greg McLean: You can't say what happens. EDGE is the Government of Alberta body, and doesn't it report up to the Minister of Environment of Alberta?

Ms. Helga Shield: I'm sorry. I just can't speak for the government.

Mr. Greg McLean: Okay, thank you.

Given the fact that there's a muddle here in that the regulator, which is a quasi-judicial body of Alberta, doesn't communicate regularly with the Government of Alberta, do you think that introducing another government body into this is going to clear up the muddle, or is it just going to make it more of a buck-passing exercise going forward?

Ms. Helga Shield: Whichever way we go forward, it's going to be critical that we are very clear on what those communication paths are and who's responsible for what.

Mr. Greg McLean: Yes, we're obviously looking here for clear lines of communication and responsibility for people's safety going forward.

Thank you very much.

I will pass the rest of my time to my next round.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have Ms. Taylor Roy.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm going to be giving some of my time to Ms. May.

I want to start with the testimony you heard on Monday. Thank you for coming and for your apologies.

Right now, given the way that first nations and the Métis nations people are feeling, I don't think that apologies are enough. What specific actions are you going to be taking? We say we can't go back and fix what's happened in the past, but we can certainly change processes moving forward.

One of the things that became very clear in the testimony on Monday, which you heard as well, was that these chiefs and representatives of the Métis nations did not feel included. They did not feel included or at the table all along. I'm sure you've heard them talking about the duty to consult and how it's been passed down from one to another. This lack of involvement was exemplified by

the fact that this investigation went on for so long, yet despite the relationship you spent years to build, they weren't involved.

I find it very hard to sit here and to say we can go back to the way things were, because I don't think this is.... Although the regulators are at fault, it's not only that; it's the fact that these first nations and Métis nations were not sufficiently involved in these decisions and processes.

How will you change that?

Mr. Brad Corson: I agree with you completely. We cannot revert to how we operated with our communications and our engagements as we go forward. We have to improve on that, and we're committed to that.

We have already expanded our communication processes with each of the communities. As we've talked about, trust is critical to us and it's going to take a long time to rebuild that trust, so we are taking actions of extensive communications and learning and listening.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Okay, but it's more than communications. I want to know about more than communications, because I think the process has to be changed to include the first nations and the Métis representatives of these communities as you're going along, rather than deciding whether you're going to consult.... It seems like the conversation is between the regulators in Alberta and yourselves, and not with the people whose land it is. How concretely will they be more involved, not just communicated to? Can you change the process in some way so that they feel more a part of what is happening and are at the table in making these decisions?

• (1705)

Mr. Brad Corson: Well, I think it does tie back to these community benefit agreements that we've established with each of the communities, which outline not just communication protocols but regular engagement protocols, and we're going further, as we have to build capacity in those communities to help them establish companies and provide services that get them fully engaged in our operations.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: I appreciate that, and the agreements, but obviously the trust in those agreements has been broken by what happened—

Mr. Brad Corson: Sure—

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: —and by the lack of communication. More than just what's in those existing agreements and the communications that have been used in the past, I feel that there has to be a more fundamental re-look at how first nations are consulted—the duty to consult—and how they are involved in the process as these decisions are being made, including with the water.

I would like to pass my time now to Ms. May, who had a question as well.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have about a minute and 15 seconds.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you very much.

Thank you to Leah Taylor Roy.

Look, Mr. Corson, I'm going to try to put to you, given how short my time is, some facts, and then ask you a question.

You've stated that Imperial Oil has a "commitment" and it has a "principle". I think you used that word. You used the words that the "core principle" at Imperial Oil is respect for the environment. I put it to you that Imperial Oil and its parent company, Exxon, were some of the most prominent companies in the fossil fuels sector in denying that climate change was a problem. Your predecessor, Robert Peterson, CEO until 2002, continued to say carbon dioxide was good for the environment.

We've known since 2006 that indigenous peoples living near your operations and the whole oil sands sector have had elevated levels of rare and fatal cancers. We've known that fact since 2006, and in 2008 we had the first published scientific papers that the toxic materials from the tailings ponds were getting into the Athabasca River. This is not new information. The corporate record of your company and of your industry is one that doesn't reflect any kind of principle of respect for the environment or human health.

Chief Tuccaro was here on Monday, and you heard him say it: that the sector, and I suppose the regulator as well, have put profits ahead of people.

I just have one question: How do you sleep at night?

The Chair: You know, that's a—

Ms. Elizabeth May: That's a question.

The Chair: It's a question, but I'm not expecting an expansive answer, because we're well over time. Maybe—I don't know—Mr. Corson, take 10 seconds to answer that.

Mr. Brad Corson: Well, Mr. Chair, I mean, I take these situations very seriously. We have work to do here. I am committed to ensuring this sort of incident does not happen again. I want to improve our trust with these communities.

More broadly, I am proud of what the company is doing as it relates more broadly to the impacts of climate change. We are a founding member of the pathways for net zero alliance in the oil sands, and we're going to continue that endeavour to support Canada's commitment to net zero by 2050.

Ms. Elizabeth May: You can give some of your new salary to Greenpeace.

The Chair: We're going into the last round.

In order to land on time, I'm going to reduce everyone's time by 25% proportionally.

Is it Ms. Goodridge? No?

We'll have Mr. Kurek for four minutes, please.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, Chair.

An hon. member: He had an extra minute also, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Well, I'll do it this time, but I'm not going to be in the habit of banking people's time. It's a little too complicated for somebody like me to handle.

Go head, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to try to get to a number of questions, but just to clarify so we're crystal clear, in the communities that were affected, has there been an impact on the quality of their drinking water related to what happened at Kearl?

Mr. Brad Corson: No.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Just to be clear as well, there has been extensive testing to ensure that this has been the case.

• (1710)

Mr. Brad Corson: That's correct.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Okay. Thank you. I know it's been talked about in somewhat of a roundabout way. I just wanted to make sure that it was very clear.

Mr. Corson, I mentioned earlier the area that I represent. It's several hundred kilometres south of where these areas are. The impact benefit agreements that are signed with many first nations and Métis groups in the area were referenced in the meeting on Monday. There's not much detail in terms of what was provided. I think there are some reasons for that. Sometimes there are those agreements concerning Métis versus those with first nations, which are under section 35 of the Constitution.

I'm just curious if you can outline a little bit about the engagement with first nations in ensuring that there are benefits to them and their people and the individuals who are in the area in terms of what happens with development with regard to Imperial Oil.

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes. Thanks for the question.

I'm going to ask Helga to respond to that, because she is directly involved in establishing those benefit agreements.

Ms. Helga Shield: I can't speak to the content of the agreements themselves because they are confidential business arrangements. If you look at the ESTMA reporting that we provide to government, you would see that in terms of fees and things that are associated with these agreements, it totals about \$16 million a year for these communities, the seven collectively.

I think what's probably more important is that, collectively, businesses that are associated with these seven communities earned revenues of over \$500 million from the Kearl operation in the year. In fact, as a company we did about \$761 million of goods and services last year with indigenous communities.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Perhaps I can ask a few more details on that, because I know some companies in my constituency do work in the Fort Mac area, some of which have indigenous employees and indigenous ownership. I'm just curious. You're talking about \$500 million in contracts to companies that are directly related with the seven communities that we're talking about here today. Can you clarify that that is in fact the case?

Ms. Helga Shield: That's correct.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Okay.

In terms of engagement in the processes to come to those agreements, I'm just curious, because there have been some questions asked, rightfully so, around engagement related to a problem. Can you expand on how these communities can trust that the engagement and the process in which that was undertaken when it comes to these benefit agreements was...?

The Chair: Answer briefly, please.

Ms. Helga Shield: These agreements were negotiated a number of years ago, when the Kearl mine was being started at that time. They're really meant to codify the way we work together, the way we engage, the way we consult. They set a structure for how we meet, how often we meet, the content of those meetings. It includes the environment, discussions, consultation, business development—

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Weiler for four minutes, please.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to move into it here, can you confirm to this committee there was no communication with the Alberta government beyond the independent Alberta Energy Regulator regarding the seepage prior to the environmental protection order?

Mr. Brad Corson: I don't have that information directly. I know we fulfilled all of our required reporting obligations with the Alberta government. I would have to defer to my colleagues here if there's knowledge about anything specific to the Alberta government beyond the regulator. I'm not sure.

Mr. Simon Younger: I'm not aware of any.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

During the review process for the Kearl mine, it was recognized, as we talked about today, that there's a higher permeability in the proposed area for the external tailings area and that the seepage could impact surface waters. The joint panel also noted that the seepage, if unmitigated, will likely impact surface water bodies to the north, such as the Firebag River, which makes the draining control systems or overflow systems very critical.

An article that was published by CBC News in April 2019 reported that Imperial was using "an older type of leak detection system that is not as sensitive as the newer, high-definition models".

Imperial has confirmed that seepage occurred in shallow layers that are not protected by the detection system.

Can somebody explain what types of tools, if any, you are currently required to use to prevent the release of toxic chemicals into the broader environment?

• (1715)

Mr. Brad Corson: I'll ask Simon to talk about the additional measures we've put in place since we've learned that there was the seepage at a shallower level.

Mr. Simon Younger: First of all, as to the questions of design, you're absolutely right. Seepage was anticipated in the design of our Kearl tailing system. That's an industry standard. We have a seepage interception system. That's exactly why it's there and what

it is installed to do. That concept is proven, and that's conventional technology that we have employed.

In terms of the question around monitoring, the way we're doing that is through monitoring wells and measuring and detecting the seepage. It was always intended that the seepage interception system would evolve and adapt as the monitoring dictated.

What we've done, and I think it's been mentioned a couple of times now, is that we've installed over 140 new monitoring and interception wells. We now have pumping at all of the four isolated locations where we detected the seepage, so the seepage is now being mitigated, and we've installed over 400 metres of trenching to also help intercept the seepage. These are very industry-standard and proven technologies that we're employing.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

In your reporting, you mentioned there was both mechanical failure as well as a process failure that took place here. My question is this: How often are the external tailings areas checked by staff?

Mr. Brad Corson: I'll let Simon continue with the discussion. What that refers to, though, is the drainage pond overflow incidents.

Maybe you can describe that, Simon.

Mr. Simon Younger: The failures that you've described relate to the drainage pond that overflowed. I want to be absolutely crystal clear, and I made the same comment recently, that the overflow should never had occurred. That was our mistake. We have learned from that error and we've made adjustments at the drainage pond in question and also at our other drainage ponds—

Mr. Patrick Weiler: I'm sorry; my time is running out.

How often is the check?

Mr. Simon Younger: Is the question how often surveillance is undertaken in that area?

It's taken routinely, regularly on every shift, multiple times per day.

The Chair: Thanks.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for two minutes.

You have time for one question.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to give my time to Ms. May.

The Chair: All right.

Ms. May, you have two minutes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

Mr. Corson, I won't ask you any rhetorical questions.

I think that you approached this evidence today with the impression that you had a communications problem.

Are you prepared to say quite clearly, publicly, that the problem is a pollution problem and that communication issues are quite secondary to the pollution problem? Do you agree?

Mr. Brad Corson: What I would say is that we had not only a communications problem with these two incidents; we also had some operational problems. We've been addressing those now through some design and equipment enhancements as well as procedural enhancements.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I want to return to a question that my colleague MP McPherson asked you, and we didn't get an answer. I think there could be a range of answers. I've looked on your website, by the way, and you said that we could find a concentration of chemical contaminants below ground on your website. Certainly, if it's there, it's not easy to find.

I want to ask now, of any of the witnesses from Imperial, what are the concentrations of toxic contaminants below ground now? You can use a range for arsenic, for naphthenic acids and for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. We know that they exceeded guidelines. What would be the range that you found in recent water sampling for those three substances?

Mr. Brad Corson: I don't have those details available to me, but we're happy to make them available to this committee.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you.

I think that's probably all of my time.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds for a statement.

Ms. Elizabeth May: In that case, I would also like to know when you plan to consider that it's a poor idea to continue pumping toxic effluents into a tailings pond that you know is leaking.

Mr. Brad Corson: We believe our operation is sound. We have made some design changes and we are confident that the system is appropriate.

• (1720)

The Chair: Ms. McPherson is next.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In a joint review for the Kearl mine, Imperial Oil stated that "it was confident that it would be able to achieve the reclamation timelines and milestones identified in the supplemental information it provided as part of its applications." Are you still confident of that?

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes, we are. I think that the guideline provides 10 years, as I recall, after we cease operation with that particular pit, and we still feel comfortable with that.

Ms. Heather McPherson: How much money has been allocated for that?

Mr. Brad Corson: Certainly we have allocated money, but I don't have that number available.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Would you say it's more or less than \$17 million?

Mr. Brad Corson: I can't comment; I don't know.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

I would like to ask a last little question to get a bit more detail with regard to the seepage. My understanding is that you are speak-

ing about the new interception wells and that they are not intercepting all of the seepage.

I believe, Mr. Younger, you spoke about this. They are new, they are working and they are working as to standard, but they are not intercepting all of the seepage. Seepage into treaty wetlands is still ongoing. Is that an accurate statement?

Mr. Simon Younger: We've had to do a multitude of different things to address the four isolated areas of seepage. Those have included very shallow trenching with well points and pumps to collect what the trenches gather. We've installed shallow well point systems.

Ms. Heather McPherson: The question was this: Is seepage still going into Treaty No. 8 wetlands? Is that still ongoing?

Mr. Simon Younger: What I also said was that—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Was that a yes?

Mr. Simon Younger: —we now have pumping at all four locations, so the seepage is being mitigated at all four locations.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Is there no seepage, or is the seepage still ongoing in Treaty No. 8 wetlands?

Mr. Simon Younger: We've now intercepted all of the seepage. What I would say is that our extensive monitoring now needs to prove that to us.

Ms. Heather McPherson: You can't confirm that because you still have not completed the monitoring. Is that correct?

Mr. Simon Younger: No, the monitoring is ongoing and continuous. As we move forward, we'll want to confirm that this remains the case.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Corson, Mr. Younger, and Ms. Shield, thank you for your testimony.

The fact that the head of Imperial Oil is with us today demonstrates the importance your company places on this tragedy, but also the importance of the major problems your company has generated. You have acknowledged your responsibilities very well and apologized. This is a step in the right direction.

Two days ago, you probably heard the testimony of the Aboriginal leaders who came to meet us. Their testimony was very touching, and for good reason. They were the first victims of this situation. The fact that you met with them and that you are here to answer questions from parliamentarians is also a step in the right direction.

However, you know better than anyone that, in order to rebuild credibility and trust, we need concrete actions and measures to ensure that First Nations are partners and not observers of the situation.

Since it is the people of Fort McMurray and the surrounding area who have suffered, I will turn it over to my colleague who represents them in the House.

[English]

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Thank you, Gérard.

I have some questions because, with trust, part of the issue has been where the accountability was. I have a question for you guys, and I'm hoping you'll be able to answer it: Has there been any internal disciplinary action taken as a direct result of the failures at Kearl Lake?

Mr. Brad Corson: Our focus to date has been solely on fixing and addressing the impact of the seepage and drainage overflow and on rebuilding trust with the communication processes. We haven't been focused on internal blame and responsibility. We are conducting our own internal investigations and we will deal with that appropriately. However, the focus has been very much on the external incident that has occurred and on making sure that it's our priority to address that.

• (1725)

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: That's fair, and I appreciate hearing that. I think it's important to make sure that we're focusing on what happened and how to prevent it.

At some point, will there be conversations and space around internal discipline, because clearly there were multiple internal failures?

Mr. Brad Corson: Certainly there will be conversations. I can't comment or speculate on what the outcome of those conversations will be until we complete all of our internal processes, but those conversations will occur.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Thank you for that.

The last question I have in the remaining time is whether you are bearing the cost of all of this engagement that you're having with the indigenous communities, and of the travel you said you've offered them through Kearl. Kearl is not an easy place to get to. Are you covering the cost?

Mr. Brad Corson: Yes. I might ask Helga to comment on that because it ties back to many of our agreements that are in place. Certainly we want to be supportive of the communities.

Ms. Helga Shield: Yes, absolutely, we are covering the cost.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Can you repeat that, so that it's on the record?

Ms. Helga Shield: Yes, we are covering the costs.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Perfect.

We will now go to Mr. McLeod.

You have the floor for four minutes.

[English]

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a quick question, because I think we can't have Imperial here without talking about the threat that still exists from the tailings ponds. As long as they exist, we're under the threat of leakage spills, and potentially more serious spills that could happen.

As a person who lived downstream from the Alberta tar sands, I've heard and had the reassurances all my life that this is not going to happen. "We have all the best technology and the best equipment. Everything works fine," but here we are.

I have to ask if you could talk a bit about how you're going to address the longer-term reclamation of the tailings ponds that Imperial has. I think that's something that can't go on anymore. We don't have solutions. We have problems, and there are still tailings ponds permits being issued. I don't think that should happen.

Maybe you can talk about how you plan to do away with all of these huge tailings ponds that exist.

Mr. Brad Corson: First, with regard to the threat you mentioned, I would comment that it is our responsibility to mitigate that risk. We are working diligently to enhance the design features and the operation to ensure that we are prudently dealing with any seepage, and working to ensure that it does not in any way threaten or endanger the river systems.

In terms of long-term tails management—

Mr. Michael McLeod: Let me interrupt you.

It doesn't give me confidence when somebody sitting here who collected a \$17-million salary and paid their directors \$8 million in bonuses—and nobody was fired over this issue—tells me that they're working on it to make it safe. You're reassuring me. You have all of this responsibility for all of these tailing ponds.

I'm asking you how you are going to make sure that this doesn't end up.... How are you going to clean it up? That's what the question is.

Mr. Brad Corson: In terms of long-term reclamation, we have developed long-term reclamation plans for the tailings ponds. They're the subject of regulatory requirements, and we're obligated to provide updates on those every year. We believe we have a very responsible plan to deal with those tailings ponds at the end of their life so that we can reclaim them and return that land to a natural ecosystem.

We have gone to great lengths to collect up to 60 plant species so that we can ensure that when it's time to reclaim and restore, we can return the land to its natural condition. We have that responsibility and we're committed to fulfilling it.

• (1730)

The Chair: Madam Taylor Roy is next.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: I just wanted to add something.

You mentioned that you had invited the communities in the area to come and see the pond. I think it would actually be a great idea for this committee to go and meet with you there to see what's going on. Maybe it's something we could discuss later. Clearly this is a very, very serious situation, one that has hugely impacted the surrounding Métis and first nations people, and I would suggest to the committee that we have a conversation at some point about actually going up to see this first-hand.

Mr. Simon Younger: We'll let the committee decide, but we would welcome that.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

As the member of Parliament for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, I would like to officially welcome every single one of the members here to come up to Fort McMurray. I would love to take you for a

tour and show you my hometown and the amazing industry that supports Canada's economy.

[Translation]

The Chair: We are at the end of our meeting. I would like to point out that at the beginning of the meeting, the witnesses tabled documents on, I believe, the communications surrounding the incident we are considering.

I would like to thank Mr. Corson, Ms. Shield and Mr. Younger for accepting our invitation to appear and I wish them safe travels back to Alberta.

Thank you to everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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