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Chair: Mr. Ron McKinnon



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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to meeting number 59 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

We will start by acknowledging that this meeting is taking place on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people. I personally am participating today from the traditional unceded territory of the Kwikwetlem First Nation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Friday, February 3, 2023, the committee resumes its study of the effects of withdrawn amendments G-4 and G-46 to Bill C-21, an act to amend certain acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms).

Today, we have two panels of witnesses. We'll deal with the first one.

In the first hour, with us in person from the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, is Chief Jessica Lazare. By video conference we have, from the Gwich'in Tribal Council, Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik.

I apologize to everyone for mispronouncing names. I'll do my best, but thank you.

Each of you will have up to five minutes to make opening remarks, after which we'll proceed with rounds of questions.

Welcome. I now invite Grand Chief Kyikavichik to make an opening statement. Please go ahead, sir, for five minutes.

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik (Gwich'in Tribal Council): *Drin gwiinzii.*

Good afternoon, honourable committee members.

My name is Ken Kyikavichik, and I am the Grand Chief of the Gwich'in Tribal Council of the Northwest Territories. I was elected in September of 2020 for a four-year term, and I am here speaking on behalf of the over 3,500 participants to our Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, a modern treaty that we signed with Canada in April 1992.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee on this very important topic. We, the Gwich'in, are the most northerly first nations people in North America. We are part of the Athapaskans, which include the Slavey, the Tlicho, the Han, the Tutchone, the Apache, the Navajo and other groups in Canada and the United States. The Gwich'in reside in 11 different communities, stretching from the interior of Alaska through northern Yukon and into the Mackenzie Valley of the Northwest Territories of Canada.

For millennia, our Gwich'in Nation has lived a nomadic and subsistence lifestyle, largely following the Porcupine caribou herd. We coexisted with these vital resources by following our values of honour, kindness and laughter; our stories; honesty and fairness; sharing and caring; and, last but certainly not least, respect.

This value of respect is where I'll be focusing my presentation. It is the basis of the perspective of the Gwich'in Tribal Council on the proposed amendments as contemplated through Bill C-21 and the current federal government strategy on firearms.

As we are all acutely aware, successive massacres, including at École Polytechnique in 1989, Concordia University in 1992, Vernon, B.C. in 1996 and, more recently, Mayerthorpe in 2005, Parliament Hill in 2014 and Nova Scotia in 2020, resulted in the tragic loss of officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and other Canadian citizens.

It is the individuals who committed these atrocious murders who are to blame for the senseless acts of violence. Mental illness, misogyny and criminal intent were behind these tragedies. However, it was access to some of the firearms specifically mentioned in the draft legislation, such as handguns and automatic assault-style rifles, that should concern us all.

Therefore, we are of the view that the proposed amendments in Bill C-21 do not go far enough in the licence revocations for known or potential assailants through the red and yellow flag laws. Our suggestion would be an automatic 60-day suspension for those with a yellow flag, and a 90-day suspension for those who have been red-flagged. This is particularly important in situations involving domestic violence.

Simply put, the Gwich'in Tribal Council supports the restriction of high-powered automatic assault weapons that are generally utilized in military applications. Far too often, some of these weapons have completely overwhelmed the authorities that we depend upon for our public safety. We cannot allow this to continue to happen. This is the reason I am here to present today.

For our Gwich'in Nation, we need to balance the public interest with the treaty-Crown partnership that was established with our organization to ensure the continued exercise of our harvesting rights throughout our established territory in the Gwich'in settlement region, which totals some 90,000 square kilometres. The essential firearms that we require to exercise our inherent and treaty rights are typically bolt- or lever-action rifles or pump-action shotguns. Rifles such as a .243, .270, .308, .30-30, .30-06 or 6.5-calibre Creedmoor are typically used for larger animals such as caribou, moose or bear, whereas 12-gauge shotguns are generally used for migratory birds such as ducks and geese. Smaller rifles, such as .22-calibre—at times semi-automatic versions—and .410-calibre or 20-gauge shotguns are used for smaller game such as rabbits, muskrats and grouse.

Our people require weapons that are durable enough to withstand our Arctic conditions, and that provide protection from foreign objects such as sand, mud and willows while also being able to be easily transported on snowmobiles or in boats along the expansive river systems of the Nagwichoonjik, or Mackenzie River; the Teetl'it Gwinjik, or Peel River; or the Mackenzie Delta of the Northwest Territories.

SKS and other long-range rifles and semi-automatic shotguns have been listed on the proposed amendments from December 2022. These are common across our communities. Specifically, the Lee-Enfield .303-calibre rifles, which are known as “ranger guns”, have historically been distributed to our participants belonging to the Canadian Rangers. These specific models will require review, as I explained in a call that I participated in with Minister Mendicino on January 31, along with other indigenous leaders from across the Northwest Territories.

• (1540)

If some of these models are listed under this legislation, a practical and proper process for a buyback program would be of interest to our participants and communities, in order to compensate for any loss that may result from the passing of this legislation. We would also be interested in potential exemptions for certain models that are critical to Gwich'in hunting and stewardship, as mentioned earlier.

We do not question the intent of these amendments. However, there's a clear requirement for continued engagement and consultation with indigenous nations such as the Gwich'in, and, more broadly, Canadians at large. People are passionate about this issue because, for many indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians, the respectful harvesting of this country's natural resources and the ability to traverse our great lands with pride and safety constitute some of our basic needs and human rights, along with rights enshrined in our treaties or established in common law. There does, however, need to be a proper balance of public safety with our rights to exercise this privilege to coexist in these habitats we all call home.

With that, I'd like to say *hai'*, or thank you, for your time and for the opportunity to present today.

The Chair: Thank you, Grand Chief.

We'll go to Chief Lazare for an opening statement.

Please go ahead for five minutes.

Chief Jessica Lazare (Mohawk Council of Kahnawake): [*Witness spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Shékon sewakwé:kon. Teiotsistohkwathe ióntiats. Kahnawake nitewaké:non.

[*Mohawk text translated as follows:*]

Hello everyone. My name is Teiotsistohkwathe. I am from Kahnawake.

[*English*]

I am Chief Jessica Lazare of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake.

I'm happy to be here. I'm here to present our position on your proposed bill.

We cannot overemphasize how integral hunting and harvesting are to our identity. Today I will present examples of how this bill will affect our ability to express that. There are potential repercussions for our right to carry out a deeply rooted cultural practice that is already restricted within the existing framework. I will also call out the lack of consultation with indigenous communities and the effects of this deficiency in creating your bill.

Harvesting is deeply woven into the Kanien'kehá:ka Mohawk culture and the fabric of who we are. As *onkwehonwe*, meaning “original people”, we have inherent practices that we've been engaging in since time immemorial. These practices are deeply ingrained in our ceremonies. They stem from inherent roles and responsibilities that are integrated into who we are from a generational and family level, from birth.

Six years ago, my son was named in a naming ceremony—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame Michaud, on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: There's no French interpretation of Ms. Lazare's speech.

[*English*]

The Chair: Very well.

Mr. Clerk, could you look into that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, were you able to hear everything from the beginning?

• (1545)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: If Ms. Lazare could start over from the beginning, I would appreciate it. It's working now.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Chief Lazare, if you wouldn't mind, please start from the top.

Chief Jessica Lazare: [Witness spoke in Mohawk as follows:]

Hen enwáton.

Teiotsistohkwathe ióntiats.

[Mohawk text translated as follows:]

Yes I can.

My name is Teiotsistohkwathe.

[English]

I am from the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake. I am here to present our position on your proposed bill.

We cannot overemphasize how integral hunting and harvesting is to our identity. Today I will present examples of how this bill will affect our ability to express that.

There are potential repercussions for our rights to carry out a deeply rooted cultural practice that is already restricted within the existing framework. I will also call out the lack of consultation with indigenous communities and the effects of this deficiency in creating your bill.

Harvesting is deeply woven into the Kanien'kehá:ka culture and fabric of who we are. As *onkwehonwe*, meaning "original people", we have inherent practices that we have been engaging in since time immemorial. These practices are deeply ingrained in our ceremonies and stem from inherent roles and responsibilities that are integrated into who we are from a generational and family level, from birth.

Six years ago, my son was named in a naming ceremony. His name was raised and words were spoken, letting him know that when the time comes, his uncles will teach him our ways and how to take on our inherent roles and responsibilities. They will take him hunting on the land. He has potential to be a father, to provide for a family and to be supported by the other men in his family to fulfill this role.

In our culture we are taught to balance our roles and responsibilities as humans with those of the other living beings here on mother earth. All this inherent knowledge and understanding is what we carry day to day.

This understanding of our roles and responsibilities, and the respect for the cycle of life, make us who we are as *onkwehonwe*. This cycle and balance have been interrupted by colonization, which has also established an evolution of our practices from bows and arrows to firearms in order to fulfill our obligations in sustaining that balance.

At the same time, the development of lands has had a cumulative impact on the hunting locations, which are now more isolated, affecting migration paths, which have decreased breeding areas. This development is detrimental to ecosystems.

Losing culture through restrictions of our rights is not just theoretical. This loss has been lived in real time by me and my family,

as well as my community and those of my sister communities of the Iroquois Caucus. The restrictions on our rights under the current licensing structure are already unacceptable, and further restrictions could be fatal to our cultural practices.

Urban sprawl and buildup around Kahnawake mean we cannot hunt where we live; nor can we travel with our appropriate firearms to hunt in Tioweró:ton, a hunting territory located in the Laurentians that is shared with Kanehsata:ke.

We often must drive many hours and take time off work, managing yearly harvests under severe time constraints. This bill and its amendments will further limit the potential for our families to harvest for sustenance during each crucial harvesting cycle. It will impact both our hunting methods and our success rate. When you start to interfere with that success, you interfere with food security and how that person can provide sustenance to their community and family.

In this context, and speaking from experience, I know that the possibility of firing successive shots can make the difference between downing an animal that will feed my family through the winter and injuring an animal that may, at best, take hours to track or, at worst, result in an injured animal dying in the woods, and wasted meat.

We understand that some of the firearm prohibitions and suspensions include a sustenance exception, requiring that firearms remain available to individuals who demonstrate that they need a firearm to hunt. However, we would like to point out that those exceptions fall short in acknowledging and respecting the reality of the people from my community, as well as those from the Iroquois Caucus.

The realities of indigenous people who travel for sustenance harvesting with their firearms are being overlooked due to the lack of consultation. Your government needs to take the time to ensure there is recognition and acknowledgement made to reflect our indigenous rights and realities.

Systemic racism in policing is also an issue for many indigenous communities. Exemptions are accessible only when other law enforcement are properly trained to understand our reality. Impacts of the provincial and federal failure to educate outside police forces are already felt by community members who face problems such as establishing and documenting their rights as sustenance harvesters and transporting firearms for hunting in other parts of Canada.

There is no carve-out in Bill C-21 for the exercise of our inherent jurisdiction rights, nor was any consultation carried out to solicit our input. There is no recognition of the way existing prohibitions and licensing already limit and have adverse impacts on our rights, and no attempt made to help us determine which specifications or models need to be protected, ensuring there is a balance between our safety and sustenance. With this, the Iroquois Caucus requests a meeting with the committee. It is for the Kanien'kehá:ka of Kahnawake, not for Canada, to decide what is fitting for our people.

We have entrusted enforcement to the Kahnawake peacekeepers. I'd also like to point out that this bill will place an administrative burden on our peacekeepers, who already face chronic underfunding, understaffing and intransigence regarding our proposals for culturally appropriate firearm control.

• (1550)

Concurrently, the lack of in-depth and comprehensive consultation with indigenous communities is demonstrated in the incoherence and inconsistency of this bill, the proposed amendments therein and the lack of acknowledgement of the rights of indigenous peoples.

The retracted amendments would have prohibited a broad spectrum of hunting rifles, shotguns and other long guns used by our hunters. Evergreen definitions may not be any better. They will curtail our ability to access new developments in firearms, as other witnesses have already pointed out. Even a cursory review of the retracted amendments reveals important inconsistencies in the firearms selected for inclusion.

You see that when you talk about firearms as objects, you forget that it's the person holding it who makes it either a tool for sustenance or a weapon. We ask that you address the real underlying problems that cause gun violence, not further restrict indigenous people from carrying out their lives in a sustainable, ceremonial and generational way.

Find a way to support firearm safety training. Find a way to support awareness against gun violence and address the mental health issues that lead to gun violence. Help demonstrate that with handling the power of a firearm comes great responsibility.

Niowén:nake.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief.

We will start our rounds of questions now, with Mr. Motz.

Please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, Chief Lazare.

I think that's probably one of the best testimonies. It's honest and real, and it speaks to the issues that we have been talking about with this bill, so thank you for that plain look at how it impacts you and your community.

I want to take you back to a comment you made early on in your introduction, about your indigenous exemptions under the order in council that came in May 2020.

We know this government is particularly bad at legislation, and now I understand. The Liberals will sometimes say the right thing, but making it happen is a different issue when it comes to actually getting the job done.

Here's a case in point. The order in council of May 2020 took away indigenous firearms that were used for sustenance hunting. The Liberals then paraded out this exemption that they talked about—an amnesty, if you will—respecting indigenous rights under section 35.

There are limitations to that, however. You touched on them briefly. I won't read the whole thing, but one of the things the excerpt talks about in the act is that the amnesty permits the person “if the specific firearm was, on [April 30, 2020], a non-restricted firearm, ...to hunt in the exercise of a right recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, or [for sustenance hunting by] the person or the family—until they are able to obtain another firearm for that use”, which, to me, seems to be a cop-out.

The Liberals give you a juicy talking point. There's no substance that potentially violates section 35 with that one short sentence in there, but it puts indigenous hunters at risk of being criminalized if they are caught with a firearm when they could possibly have taken a prohibited firearm and not bought a new one.

What are your thoughts on that? How do you address that with your community? Have indigenous hunters from your community addressed that as a concern to you?

Chief Jessica Lazare: It definitely is a concern, as I have brought it today. I was only given five minutes to speak on it.

However, when it comes to the criminalization of these weapons, like I have mentioned, it's really difficult to prove that we have the right to the weapons. The permitting, especially in Quebec—my community is located in Quebec—is not consistent. It is non-functioning at the moment. I know there are a few of them waiting for their PALs and waiting for different permits in order to hold different weapons and, I guess, the essence of family hunting as well.

There are limits, as well, on the kinds of guns you can have or the number of weapons you can have. If families go hunting together, they cannot travel together, because there are limits to that. It affects the present practices we have in hunting.

• (1555)

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you for that.

I also appreciated your explanation in regard to how the act as proposed in C-21 really doesn't impact public safety. It goes after the wrong issue. It impacts your community as indigenous hunters. It impacts sport shooters, hunters and farmers across the country.

One of the things I have seen recently is that the government in Quebec is spending some money dealing with some of those issues they find to be the real problem, which is smuggling from the U.S. into Canada. They're spending over \$6 million over a number of years to try to make that happen. The minister of public safety in Quebec talked about the money that will make that region safer.

We've mentioned a lot in this committee and the House that if we really wanted to impact public safety, we would need to close some of the porousness of our border and provide resources at our border to impact the illegal smuggling of firearms into this country, rather than spending the resources going after law-abiding Canadian firearm owners, including indigenous communities, who are not public safety risks.

How do you see what this Quebec initiative is doing? Do you have any suggestions from your nation for the federal government as to what we need to do to seal up our border to stop the illegal smuggling of firearms into this country? This is a significant problem, as identified by law enforcement across the country.

Chief Jessica Lazare: In speaking with Minister Mendicino, I think it was two weeks ago, I mentioned that the perspective of the federal government is on the weapon itself as being the killer. I made it clear to him that his position on that was different from ours and that we see the person behind the weapon itself.

As for the border issue, I think more resources and funding should go to investigative approaches to, I guess, the smuggling ring, if you would call it that, and more education and funding on the expertise and funding towards policing.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

Mr. Glen Motz: Already? I just got warmed up, Chair.

The Chair: Well, maybe you'll get a chance in the next round.

We'll go now to Ms. Damoff, please, for six minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you.

I'd like to begin by thanking both of our witnesses for being with us today. Your testimony is very important to our work to determine what to do next on assault weapons.

My first question is for both of you.

Mr. Motz mentioned the order in council and that there was an amnesty for indigenous people exercising their section 35 hunting rights. If there were something brought forward dealing with an assault weapon ban, would you support something similar that would exclude indigenous people from that ban?

I'll start with you, Chief Lazare, and then we can go to you, Grand Chief.

Chief Jessica Lazare: In terms of the assault rifle ban, I'm going to be extremely honest. I'm not completely privy to all the different types of weapons that are listed. I'm not completely aware or completely understanding of the different types of weapons.

However, I would not be able to answer questions like that based on the fact that we have not had the opportunity to consult across the confederacy and across the Iroquois Caucus. To answer that question would require further consultation.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That's fair. Maybe you could take it back. My thinking is that anything we did would exclude indigenous people who are using their firearms for hunting.

Grand Chief, do you have any thoughts on that?

• (1600)

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: Well, of course, we need to understand the details behind this, but as I stated in my opening comments, we would support any restriction on high-powered, automatic assault weapons that are generally used in military applications, for example.

I listed out the common firearms that we utilize in our territory of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon of Canada, and I did that by design so that people can see the types of weapons that we require to exercise some of our section 35 rights and also those that have been enshrined in our modern treaty.

With that said, we know our lifestyle and our subsistence harvesting will evolve in accordance with our rights. What I have declared as the common weapons today—rifles and shotguns, primarily—may change over time. We need to be cognizant that any changes in our harvesting practices to keep up with technology and conservation, keeping in mind our subsistence way of life, are not infringed on unnecessarily by any future bans on these types of weapons.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Grand Chief.

I wonder if you could clarify something for me. My colleague, Mr. Lloyd, just tweeted that in your testimony you said the bill is targeting hunting rifles. Does that accurately depict what you said? That's not what I heard.

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: No. It targets some that we use, which we need to have further discussion and engagement on, but as we understand it, a lot of the weapons and rifles that we use are not mentioned specifically.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

I wonder if you could expand on the red flag for us. We had testimony from women's groups who were opposed to the red flag provision in the bill, and I noted that you said you are supportive of it. I, myself, am supportive of it because it's one more tool that we can offer for women. It's not perfect, but I'm just wondering if you could perhaps expand on that.

If I have time, Chief Lazare, I'll also go to you.

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: Because of the prevalence of subsistence harvesters in our community, there's ease of access to firearms, and when we have situations of domestic violence, whether they're perpetrated by men or women, it is a concern, especially when you're in northern, remote communities with limited police support.

It is that view, as well as experiences that I am aware of that some of our people—especially our women—have had when they are in these types of situations and their health and safety is at immediate risk.... There does not seem to be enough swift action taken to protect these individuals so that they are not fearing for their lives as they're putting themselves and their children to sleep.

That is the view from which we look at this. It's an automatic rescindment so there is time to have the proper assistance provided to the impacted families—and the assailants themselves—because clearly there is something at risk going on that needs to be addressed.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have only about 30 seconds left.

Chief Lazare, I don't know if you had a chance to look at the red flag provision in the bill or not.

Chief Jessica Lazare: I will answer as briefly as possible.

I believe there is a bit of give and take in terms of that red flag provision. I know there are pros and cons. However, when it comes to the systemic racism that we have in policing, there are a lot of issues that need to be fixed before we can consider things like that.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

[Translation]

Now let's go to Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Michaud, you have six minutes.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for being here with us.

I'm going to address Ms. Lazare first.

You're here testifying today, and you also issued a press release and sent a letter to the chair of our committee and to the Minister of Public Safety. But I'm wondering whether you support the spirit of the bill. You said it will have severe, unacceptable repercussions for your community.

Is that how you feel about amendments G-4 and G-46 alone, or about the bill as a whole?

• (1605)

[English]

Chief Jessica Lazare: It's essentially the whole bill.

As I mentioned before, lack of consultation is one of our major concerns, and it's important. Given the opportunity, we would give you a comprehensive perspective of our lived realities. It would allow your government to balance your perspectives, without having an adverse impact on indigenous people's ability to hunt and harvest.

Opportunities that allow us to deliberate on the common threads among our nations should be required in order to give you a more in-depth description of any special exemption or required amendments we would like to see.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: What I'm hearing is that there was a serious lack of consultation, and the Minister of Public Safety didn't meet with you.

Is that correct?

[English]

Chief Jessica Lazare: We met with Mr. Mendicino. That was on February 22, 2023. That was, I think, about a week or two after we sent the letter.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Okay.

Did your conversation with him clear anything up or allay any of your concerns? What came out of that conversation?

[English]

Chief Jessica Lazare: It was beneficial, in the sense that we got to meet face to face. He got to see where we were coming from, as a council. He didn't just discuss it with one individual, but spoke with the whole council. He got a bit of our experience.

However, I do not deem that to be adequate consultation.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

I'd like to come back to Bill C-21.

In response to questions from my colleague, Ms. Damoff, you said that not enough was known about the list and that there wasn't enough information. We don't know which firearms you think should be on the list and which should not.

I'm trying to understand something. You're against the bill, which means you're against certain parts of it. I wonder if you could tell us more. Generally speaking, which firearms do your members use for hunting? Are there certain firearms you think should be exempt? How do you see this in general?

I understand that not everyone is happy with this bill, but the whole reason this committee is holding additional meetings is to come up with solutions for improving the process.

I gather that the main message you want to send is that more consultation of all the people affected by Bill C-21 is needed.

Aside from that, do you have any recommendations for us?

[English]

Chief Jessica Lazare: I don't have any specific recommendations to make, because we weren't provided an opportunity to delegate or discuss among ourselves, as nations, in order to answer that.

The governance framework we work in is not necessarily a party kind of governance framework. It's more of a consensus-based framework. We all have differing opinions, perspectives and realities. As I said, give us the opportunity and time to come together to create that list of exemptions, so we can find the common threads. Then, we can suggest what to amend in this bill.

I'm one person. I am representing the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake. I cannot speak on behalf of other indigenous communities, essentially. However, I've been given the go-ahead to speak on behalf of the Iroquois Caucus, which feels the same way I do in regard to the lack of consultation and the time we have for consultation. It requires a lot of time and energy that governments don't have the patience for, as I've witnessed. They don't have the understanding of how there are a lot of different factors to consider.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

Lastly, I have some questions I'd like to ask you about one thing that struck me.

In your letter, you wrote:

[English]

The Bill will place unfair burdens on the shoulders of the Peacekeepers who safeguard our territory and will increase the potential for discriminatory...over-policing of our people off-territory.

• (1610)

[Translation]

Could you give the committee some details about how the bill could make more work for your members who are peacekeepers?

[English]

Chief Jessica Lazare: As I mentioned, we have hunting territory in the Laurentians, about an hour away from our community. The peacekeepers are our entrusted enforcement for the community of Kahnawake, as well as Tioweró:ton. We have to travel an hour to get to that territory. However, if you start enforcing the gun restrictions, that hour from Kahnawake to Tioweró:ton is an hour wherein someone is risking...when they bring their weapons to that hunting territory. It's an hour they're risking.

We have our own jurisdiction in Kahnawake. That jurisdiction applies to Tioweró:ton. Because of colonization and developments, we are separated by an hour, and we are not connected to that territory. We cannot hunt in our territory.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

We go now to Mr. Julian.

Mr. Julian, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses.

Grand Chief and Chief Lazare, you're offering valuable testimony today, which I think will help our committee look to tracing a path forward.

I'd like to start with you, Chief Lazare, to understand the issue of the lack of consultation you flagged in your presentation. You said you met with the minister on February 22. Prior to that, was the Mohawk Council, the Iroquois Caucus, consulted in any way about

this legislation? If not, when was the last time that there was any approach from the federal government on firearms legislation?

Chief Jessica Lazare: There was none that I'm aware of right now. I am new to the Iroquois Caucus, so I am still getting briefed on the different files they've taken on. Based on previous discussions, they're not necessarily addressing Bill C-21, and they haven't been addressing Bill C-21 as of yet.

Mr. Peter Julian: Prior to February 22, there just was no consultation. The federal government didn't come to you in any way, either to the council or to the caucus, to ask your views on the legislation.

Chief Jessica Lazare: No.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. You have spoken very eloquently about the amendments. The NDP certainly shared your concerns about the amendments. We pushed procedurally to have them withdrawn.

On the principle of the bill around the handgun freeze, is there a position that either the Mohawk Council or the Iroquois Caucus has taken around the principle of a freeze on handguns?

Chief Jessica Lazare: No.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. You have no position on that.

Chief Jessica Lazare: No.

Mr. Peter Julian: That's very good to note. Thank you.

I want to come back to the issue of transporting firearms from your community and the issue of the impacts on peacekeepers as well. Is it your impression that the way firearms legislation is implemented currently, it makes it difficult for law enforcement—in this case, the peacekeepers—to enforce the legislation?

Chief Jessica Lazare: Yes and no. It's difficult to explain that we have jurisdiction over our community and that we have exemptions within our community. It is difficult to.... I don't know how to word this, to be honest: It's a yes-or-no answer.

The peacekeepers are community members as well. They are hunters as well. To manage what happens as soon as somebody leaves our territory, leaves Kahnawake or leaves Tioweró:ton, to go to another nation's territory, say, or to another hunting ground as a guest of that nation, it's out of the hands of the peacekeepers.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

Chief Jessica Lazare: There are challenges, but within the community of Kahnawake, the peacekeepers are understaffed, and they are underfunded in terms of being able to execute what needs to be done.

• (1615)

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you for that.

I'd like to move on to the Grand Chief.

Thank you for being here today. I'd like to ask you the same question around consultation.

Was the Gwich'in Council consulted in any way prior to the legislation coming forward, prior to the amendments coming forward or after the amendments were tabled?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: Before the amendments, no. After, yes: We had one meeting with Minister Mendicino at the end of January.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay, but prior to that, there was no consultation. Thank you for that.

I'd like to ask you the same question in terms of the principles of the bill around the freeze on handguns. Does the Gwich'in Council have a position on that? You've raised some very valuable additional testimony that I'd like to come back to, but on the principle of the bill itself, the handgun freeze, do you have a position?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: Well, we struggle to see why anyone would need handguns in our territory, other than for crime-related purposes.

Mr. Peter Julian: Then you'd probably be supportive of the handgun freeze.

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: That's correct.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

In your testimony, you pointed to the weaknesses of the amendments. I think that's something we've come to a consensus on as a committee.

You also mentioned the issue of exemptions. Could you give us a sense of what you feel the exemptions should look like, what that would affect? What's your overall approach, or what would the approach of the Gwich'in Tribal Council be in terms of an exemption on this legislation?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: We're of the view that it could be somewhat of a slippery slope. The reason we have provided this testimony is to indicate specifically which models of firearms we want to ensure are not on such a list, such that we don't need an exemption, and that these firearms are not on any list that is restricted by the Government of Canada for those that have been approved or licensed to be able to have them. That's our position.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

Mr. Chair, you're going to give me an extension. That's great. I'd be more than pleased, or are you cutting me off?

The Chair: I was cutting you off, but I was muted. I had all this eloquent stuff in which I thanked you, but I was muted, so you're going to be missing that.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Julian.

We'll start our second round now, with Mr. Shipley for five minutes, please.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I have a point of order.

Given the time, are we doing full rounds or are we going to—

The Chair: I think this will be an abbreviated round. I think we'll have four slots, one for each party.

Go ahead, Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is for Chief Lazare.

The Minister of Public Safety recently had some meetings with your community. It was reported in the local media on February 24, and there were some quotes from a member of your community, Bobby Patton. I'm not sure if you're familiar with that gentleman. You're nodding your head yes. I'm going to read these because I don't want to misquote him. What he said is really interesting. I'll ask for your comments.

This is what Mr. Patton said:

"It's not like hunting back in the olden days where (animals) were plentiful, easy to get to," Patton said. He noted that hunting grounds have shrunk as development has intensified and populations have grown, increasing the need for efficiency in hunting.

"If you want to go out and you want to kill one goose, one shot, one kill, perfect," he said, invoking those who are hunting for sport. However, he insists that goose hunters targeting the animals for sustenance depend on more aggressive weapons to yield enough meat.

"They all depend on their semi-automatic weapons. One shot, you're not going to get much from," he said.

"It's going to limit the amount of harvest it's going to bring back to the community, to the people. It's going to lead to a lot of people probably starving," said Patton.

Could you elaborate on that? That's quite a comment by Mr. Patton, that people would be starving.

Chief Jessica Lazare: A lot of our community members are trying to go back to our original ways, and a lot of our community members do live off of hunting game that they successfully hunt. There's moose meat, deer meat, geese that I know of, that I've tried. The rest I haven't tried. There's beaver. There are so many different game used for sustenance, and a lot of families do rely on that. They prefer not to go to the local IGA. They prefer not to go to the local Metro or local grocery stores. They prefer to hunt and harvest their own game and grow their own produce in their own gardens and greenhouses.

• (1620)

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that.

Obviously, it would be quite an impact if it was rescinded and taken back, but if these amendments went through, it would be very tough to think that people could potentially be starving because of this.

It's not my quote, members across. That was Bobby Patton, a member of this community. You can laugh and make all the comments you want, but you can call him if you want.

My second question is for the grand chief.

Grand Chief, you mentioned that you're for the handgun ban. I just want to get some clarification. We had the Fur Institute of Canada in a meeting, and we've heard from other trappers also that trappers, quite often for their own safety, use handguns. Do they not use them up in your area? We're hearing conflicting reports on this.

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: No, the use of handguns, especially by those that are trapping, is not common.

Mr. Doug Shipley: It's not common, but is it used at all?

We had heard that safety issues.... Because they're carrying so much gear—they went to a great depth of detail on it—they needed to have a handgun on them, many times for safety reasons.

You've never heard of that up in your area.

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: Being raised by a trapper and uncles who were trappers, and being raised in a traditional camp myself, I have never seen a handgun utilized by our people for that purpose.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that.

I'd like to go back to Ms. Lazare.

In December, the Assembly of First Nations unanimously passed a resolution to publicly oppose Bill C-21 on the basis that amendments introduced by the government could potentially criminalize long guns or rifles used by first nation peoples in exercising their aboriginal treaty rights to sustenance hunt and harvest.

Do you share these concerns?

Chief Jessica Lazare: Absolutely.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Grand Chief, do you also share these concerns?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: Could I get you to reiterate the question?

Mr. Doug Shipley: I was asking if you agree with the Assembly of First Nations unanimously passing the resolution to oppose Bill C-21?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: No, we are not in agreement with that resolution.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Could you explain why that is?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: It's for the reasons that I outlined in my testimony. We believe that this legislation is required, and we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bath water.

We certainly need some consultation on this, but there are some interesting components and aspects of this legislation, particularly those restrictions around handguns and the red and yellow flag conditions, as well as a lot of the rifles that are listed in the proposed legislation.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, sir.

Mr. Doug Shipley: That's not really enough to ask a question, so I'll pass that along.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

We'll go now to Mr. Noormohamed.

You have five minutes, please.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for making the time to be with us today.

Chief Lazare, I'd like to start with you.

Can you share with us what the impact of the 2020 OIC was on your community? What was the impact of the 2020 order in council?

Chief Jessica Lazare: I'm sorry. There are so many acronyms in my job, I forget what they are.

I cannot reiterate this enough. There is extreme systemic racism in policing. When you don't train the officers, federally or provincially, on the rights of indigenous peoples, those rights get overlooked.

On an individual basis, in real-life practice, when an individual from my community or any indigenous community is stopped when trying to exercise their right, the officer at hand is not trained properly in how to deal with that matter, is not aware of that matter and is not informed of that matter.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: What I'm trying to understand, though.... I agree with you. I think it's really important that all of our law enforcement is well aware of the challenges your communities face.

What I'm trying to understand, though, is this. Given that there was the carve-out specifically for indigenous communities in the order in council in 2020, I'm trying to understand what the specific impact, if any, was on your community.

If there wasn't one, the question I would ask is whether a similar carve-out would be helpful to you in any future....in Bill C-21, for example.

• (1625)

Chief Jessica Lazare: Can you repeat the question?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: What I'm trying to understand is, given that there was a specific carve-out in the order in council in 2020 that protected the rights of indigenous communities to continue to hunt, would something like that in Bill C-21 not address your concerns, given, hopefully, that there was no impact from 2020?

Chief Jessica Lazare: No.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: It wouldn't.

I'm trying to understand. If there was no impact in 2020, why would a similar provision now cause concern?

Chief Jessica Lazare: There is an impact.

I don't know how to explain this. I'm sorry. I'm tripped up for words.

There is an impact in terms of the awareness. I know you're saying that law enforcement is aware. They're aware of our struggles and they're aware of the challenges.

They are not properly educated, and they are not properly trained. That's the challenge. You can say all you want. You can put it in legislation that there are exceptions, but when it comes into practice, that's where the challenge really lies.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: The issue is in the implementation of the legislation.

Chief Jessica Lazare: It's in the implementation and the resources.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I get it. Okay. That's helpful to know, because I think it helps us understand some of the challenges around this.

Grand Chief, can I ask you the same question? What were the impacts on your community following the 2020 order in council, if there were any?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: I'm not aware of any impacts.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: If there were a similar carve-out or a similar exemption for indigenous communities in Bill C-21, how would you feel about that? Would that be helpful?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: We need to understand the weapons that have been identified. As I stated earlier, for this to be proper legislation, we would need to discuss what these potential exemptions would be.

From our perspective, we could certainly share the rifles and shotguns that are typically used by our people, such that there is no need for an exemption and they are not on the prohibited list.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: In your answer to my friend, Mr. Shipley, you talked about the importance of making sure this legislation is passed. You said, "We shouldn't throw the baby out with the bath water," and I think you are right. All of us recognized that there was room for improvement, and I think that is a very important premise for why we are having the conversations.

Can you explain to us why, for your community, this legislation is important, and why it's important for us to not throw the baby out with the bath water and to come to a good outcome?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: We're starting to see an increased prevalence of drugs and illicit activity in our communities. Like in a lot of indigenous communities across the country, gangland violence is a concern. Some of the weapons that have been listed on this potential legislation are often carried by these individuals. They are used to incite fear, intimidation and ultimately compliance among our people.

Looking forward into the future, any legislation that looks to restrict.... Some of these assault or automatic weapons that are typically military in nature need to be removed, because as we look toward things like potential self-government for our Gwich'in region, we need our police forces to have the equipment and the weaponry to be able to combat some of these criminals.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

[Translation]

Ms. Michaud, you have two and a half minutes.

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

The rest of my questions will be for you, Grand Chief.

You've said several times that you support a ban on high-capacity semi-automatic firearms.

Could you tell us again what "high-capacity" means to you?

[English]

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: I'm referring to at least 90% of the rifles that have been listed on the proposed legislation. There are many of them on there. I'm not going to get into specifics at this

particular juncture, but I said "assault-style automatic weapons". We do use some semi-automatic rifles, as I mentioned earlier in my testimony, and I want to be clear on the delineation between the fully automatic and the semi-automatic weapons.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: So you'd want the ban to exclude the semi-automatic rifles commonly used for hunting, for example.

[English]

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: That is correct.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Okay, thank you.

In your opening remarks, you also mentioned that you would support a buyback program for firearms that become prohibited. Did you mean assault rifles, handguns or both? I know the government has promised to create a buyback program for military-style assault rifles, but nothing's been announced for handguns. Let's not forget that Bill C-21 was originally about handguns.

Are you envisioning a buyback program that would cover both assault rifles and handguns?

• (1630)

[English]

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: The buyback would be in force only for a lot of the rifles that have been prohibited or deemed prohibited under potential legislation and are used for subsistence harvesting by our people. There will be some instances in which individuals are in possession of restricted firearms if the previous Bill C-21 is passed. It is in those instances that we would look at a buyback program.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: When the government finally consulted you, was the buyback program discussed? I believe you said you met with Mr. Mendicino on January 31.

[English]

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: Yes, it was, along with other leaders from across the Northwest Territories. There were at least a couple who had mentioned support for this type of program.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

We will go now to Mr. Julian.

Mr. Julian, you have the hammer. You have two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Grand Chief, I'd like to follow up on Madame Michaud's questions around the buyback. You mentioned in your testimony, basically—and I'm paraphrasing you—that it's important to have a properly done buyback program. Was it discussed with the minister, or do you or the Gwich'in Council have recommendations around how a buyback program should be structured so that it meets the needs of indigenous people?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: We do not at this time. It can be the focus of some of our discussions on continued consultation on this potential legislation.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

You also mentioned the issue of gangland violence, which is something that we're facing everywhere. We've seen a marked increase, and law enforcement has seen a marked increase in the use of ghost guns. They're untraceable, and 3D printers can put them together using firearm components. They can produce a deadly weapon that is untraceable.

Do you have concerns about the use of ghost guns, and is this something you feel the government should be taking more seriously as well?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: I'm not particularly familiar with ghost guns. I've been hearing about them only recently. However, nothing really surprises me anymore with the artillery that's being used by those who operate in the drug world and that's making its way into our northern and remote communities.

Mr. Peter Julian: Locally, you have seen some of the same concerns raised, or you've actually seen the production of ghost guns or the sale of ghost guns in the same way that in some regions of the country we've seen a marked increase. This is certainly something that law enforcement has flagged as well. Is it something that is of concern to you?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: It is not at this time.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. I have only a few seconds.

You mentioned, as well, the issue of military-style weapons. Do you believe that manufacturers should also bear some responsibility when it comes to these types of weapons being present in Canada?

Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik: As I stated earlier, there's clearly a need for broad-based consultation with all Canadians—indigenous and non-indigenous—and that includes manufacturers that are stakeholders in this legislation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian. That wraps up our questioning for this panel.

I would like to thank our witnesses, Grand Chief Kyikavichik and Chief Lazare. Thank you very much for your time today and for helping us in our study.

With that, I will suspend to bring in the next panel.

Thank you.

• (1630) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1640)

The Chair: With that, we will resume this meeting.

Welcome to our new panel.

With us today, via video conference, we have Ms. Lynda Kiejko, Olympian, as an individual.

We were supposed to have Dr. Simon Chapman, but he had some difficulty with his equipment and will not be able to participate. He will send a brief, I understand.

We also have, from the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs, Monsieur Marc Renaud, president, and Madame Emily Vallée, communications coordinator.

Each group will have up to five minutes for opening remarks. Afterwards, we will start our questions.

We will start now. I will invite Ms. Kiejko to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Ms. Lynda Kiejko (Olympian, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

My name is Lynda Kiejko. I am a two-time Olympian in the sport of pistol shooting. I am also president of the Alberta Handgun Association, which is an organization that fosters and promotes the ISSF, otherwise known as the Olympic style of competition. I come from a family of Olympians and pistol shooting. My father and one of my sisters were both Olympians.

I am very grateful for this opportunity to appear before the committee today. However, I'm also very angry and sad. I'm angry that my tax dollars are being wasted on policy that doesn't increase public safety. I'm angry that no matter how well I follow the law, the law keeps changing. These law changes are impacting me, and people like me, directly.

I take great pride in representing my country on the world stage, as do all athletes. I'm sad that due to the handgun ban, the order in council, Bill C-71 and this proposed legislation, I will not be able to represent Canada on the world stage. Athletes who come after me won't even have an opportunity to compete, as they will have no access to competition firearms.

I am angry this government has no concern for actual safety. If an actual effort were made to increase public safety, I likely would not be here as a witness. If you had the interest of public safety in mind, the measures you take would not affect me, a vetted firearm owner. Your measures would affect criminals. Nothing I see proposed in Bill C-21 or the withdrawn amendments makes measurable improvements to public safety.

Criminals have criminal behaviour. No matter what the law says, criminals will continue doing what they do. Instead of reducing crime, your handgun bans, orders in council and efforts to virtue signal that you're doing something have increased my paperwork by six weeks in order to represent Canada on the world stage. I now pay the government for the privilege of returning home with my guns, which are my property, on every return to Canada. The extra paperwork I do does not make you, my community or my children safer than they were before your measures were put into place. It is a waste of my tax dollars. Instead of preparing to compete against my peers from Ukraine, Greece, South Korea and France—among many others—I'm doing paperwork for the privilege of not being arrested or having my competition equipment confiscated at the border when I return home.

These measures also remove any opportunity I have to take up hunting, which is something my father did, and which is an inherent Canadian tradition. Not only do I need to have my PAL, but I need to take a hunter's safety course and plan out details of where I will hunt. Banning semi-automatic rifles removes this opportunity. Almost all hunters use semi-automatic rifles with the same magazine capacity as my competition handgun. The course that PAL holders are required to take, on top of hunter education courses, makes hunters and competitive shooters safer with firearms than the majority of the population. I am constantly having my background checked as a PAL holder.

I have small children. Firearm safety is very important to me. My firearms are not a public safety threat and neither am I; neither are my teammates, my family or my friends. The measures this government is taking will destroy competitive shooting sports in Canada. There are so many more than just the narrow few who make it to the Olympics. It will destroy our hunting culture, by which we provide for our own families.

As Canadians, we are all proud to see a Canadian competing on the world stage and bringing home a medal. That will end in the shooting sports because of the bans already put in place or currently being proposed. Removing a tool does not decrease violence. My sports equipment and hunting tools are not public safety threats.

Thank you very much.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kiejko.

We'll go now to Monsieur Renaud, president of the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs.

Allez-y, s'il vous plaît. You have five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Renaud (President, Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs): Mr. Chair, committee members, I am speaking to you as president of the Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs. The mission of our not-for-profit organization is to represent hunters and anglers and promote safe practices.

Our educational arm, Sécurité nature, has a contract with the government to deliver introductory hunter education courses and the Canadian Firearms Safety Course. Each year, about 60,000 participants take our training.

Ever since we started teaching firearms safety in 1994, the year the course was created, we have always focused on education and prevention rather than gun control. We are doing our part by going above and beyond our training obligations: We carry out firearms safety awareness campaigns, and we provide hunters with a website about safe firearm transportation and storage, along with other one-off initiatives like distributing trigger locks.

Our overall position on gun control is that there should be limited constraints for legitimate gun owners, hunters or sport shooters who have taken training and who hold a possession and acquisition licence.

During the backlash caused by the amendments proposed in November to Bill C-21, we identified two key issues. The first is that the amendments, as drafted, were not clear enough. The confusion created by the definition of an assault weapon and the list of prohibited weapons shows that this control measure missed the mark. Law-abiding hunters and sport shooters felt justifiably worried about this ban, which could have captured guns that they had been using for years to carry out safe, legal activities.

The second issue is the public's lack of knowledge about firearms, which colours political decision-making. We see that firearms are being placed on the list of prohibited weapons on the basis of aesthetic and ergonomic criteria, rather than objective criteria based on the firearm's capacity. Also, some people see semi-automatic rifles as military weapons, but this mechanism is necessary for certain types of hunting. Let me remind you that magazine capacity is already regulated. Generally speaking, the limit is five cartridges, and in the specific case of migratory bird hunting, the limit is three cartridges under federal law.

We would like the Canadian regulations to focus on the real criminals instead of criminalizing legitimate gun owners.

First, a definition of assault weapon that's based on objective criteria, not the style of the gun, should be created. If the definition is accepted by the majority of the hunting and sport shooting community, it should then be applied retroactively to all the schedules of prohibited firearms. Then it would finally be possible to stop working off lists that are constantly being updated, creating concern and confusion.

In summary, we strongly believe in the power of education and prevention for promoting firearms safety. Our members want to feel safe, too, and they hope new laws intended to improve public safety focus on the right targets. Hunters and sport shooters who comply with the training requirements and get the right licences are the wrong target.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

We'll start our rounds of questions now with Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Dancho, please go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both witnesses for being with us today. We greatly appreciate your testimony. On this panel we have a sport shooting perspective and a hunting perspective. It's very good to hear from both of you.

Ms. Kiejko, I have a few questions for you concerning your experience.

We know, of course, the Liberals have brought forward successive gun bans. It began with C-71. Then there was the May 2020 OIC, which added hundreds of models. We then saw the so-called handgun freeze, which we know is a long-term ban. The latest ban is certainly one of the largest hunting rifle bans in Canadian history, and now we're talking about that since it has been withdrawn.

What I hear from sport shooters and hunters is that they feel they are being punished and attacked. As an Olympian who's represented Canada as a sport shooter on two occasions, and as someone from a family of Olympic sport shooters, I'm wondering if you could share your experience on the impact these successive bans have had on you.

Ms. Lynda Kiejko: I would say there's definitely a direct impact on competitive shooters specifically. I didn't used to have to do a whole stack of extra export and import paperwork to be able to leave and come back to the country with my own firearms, which are registered within this country and have already been imported. I now pay to import them every time I come back home from a competition.

One of my teammates is trying to look into avenues to acquire a new competition firearm and is facing significant challenges. Essentially, new equipment comes on the market, and it has new technology. It's better equipment; it's better in competition and has better performance, and we are now going to be banned from that. We're going to have significant challenges acquiring those—if it's possible at all.

There are very few importers who will even take on the challenge of trying to work through the rules to find those exemptions where they're listed for Olympians.

However, being an Olympian is one thing. I mean, I'm the only pistol Olympian who has attended the last two Olympics. If we're talking only about supporting Olympians, we're talking about supporting me and that's about it. It means you ban all my teammates who are looking to make the Olympics.

If we're talking about Olympic sports, there is a huge number of people who are involved in these sports, but now we're shutting down the opportunities to participate in these sports. We're refusing people access to the equipment to be able to even try it. I see it as a significant impact.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

For more on that, I think perhaps folks who aren't familiar with firearms at all think all guns are created equal. They think they're all the same and that a gun's a gun. Certainly, that's absolutely not the case. Anyone who uses firearms at all would know that.

To your point, this is a vital tool, obviously, to competing at the Olympic level. We also have IPSC and other international competitive bodies and national competitive bodies.

To your point, if you're not able to hold the firearm before you buy it, and if you're not able to buy new parts for it or if it's very difficult to do so, to me, this really seems like it will certainly eliminate competitive sport shooting in Canada, which has been around for a very long time. Certainly the Conservatives are very proud to see you, Ms. Kiejko, as an Olympian representing us on the world stage.

Given these restraints, do you feel that there will be any more Olympians following you? What impact is this going to have on Olympic and competitive sport shooting in Canada?

Ms. Lynda Kiejko: Considering how hard it is to make the Olympics to begin with, we're talking.... At any Olympic games, maybe 300 athletes in the entire country actually make the Olympic games. We're talking about a very small number of people to begin with.

When we're talking about shooting sports, to be able to produce an Olympian you need a huge mass of people competing to push each other to do better and to strive for better achievements and performances. If you cut off access to the competition, the training and the teammates, you essentially obliterate any opportunity we have of putting an Olympian into the Olympics, let alone onto the podium.

You need the opportunity, the training and the availability.

• (1655)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You mentioned a few countries that compete at the Olympic level in sport shooting. There are many of them. Can you list off a few of the top competitors in the world in sport shooting?

Ms. Lynda Kiejko: Some of the top competitors, off the top of my head, in my event specifically, are Ukraine, Greece and South Korea. China's going to be in there as well. Some of the others that are on the top list are escaping me, but throughout Europe...there's France as well.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: There's France and Germany. Yes, thank you very much.

Canada will no longer be able to compete, in essence, against those other countries that are supported by their governments—unlike ours. It's very disappointing.

Certainly the Conservatives are very proud that you have competed at the Olympic level and represented Canada with such pride and integrity. I wanted to put on the record how proud we are of you, Ms. Kiejko, for what it's worth.

To conclude, I have a few other things.

My understanding is that out of all the Olympic sports, sport shooting is one of the safest ones. As well, as you mentioned, you are not a violent person, yet you're being treated like you are.

In our concluding half a minute, could you comment on a few of those things?

Ms. Lynda Kiejko: Yes. There was a study done in 2016 and a new one in 2020 that literally listed off statistics of injuries in different events in different sports. Surprise, surprise—shooting doesn't have any, which I think is a huge testament to the safety culture we have in shooting sports. It's a safety culture. We're always going to be safe, and we're not going to have those injuries or incidents that are going to be there. There are studies available that actually prove that point.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

We'll go now to Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Damoff, please go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Kiejko, for joining us again and providing us with your testimony.

I have a few questions about Olympic participation. You participate in the summer Olympics, and then we also have Olympians who participate in winter Olympics, in the biathlon. Is that correct?

Ms. Lynda Kiejko: Yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Of the athletes who attend—and the first Olympics we went to was in 1908—how many participate in pistol shooting with you?

Ms. Lynda Kiejko: Since 1908...I don't have the number in front of me.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That's okay. How many go to the Olympics with you when you go?

Ms. Lynda Kiejko: At the last two Olympics I was the only pistol shooter. Previous to that, in 2012, there was only one pistol shooter as well. I think we've had a pistol shooter in the Olympics every summer Olympics, I'm going to say, since probably the early eighties, when they split off men's and women's events. They've definitely had women in every event, I think, since 1984. There was even a gold medal at the 1984 Olympics in women's pistol shooting.

There's also been a long history of male pistol shooters. Since they changed the rules for how we qualify, there have been smaller shooting teams, I think, since 1996, based on how qualifications work. Prior to that, there were significant shooting teams across the rifle, pistol and shotgun disciplines that are available within the shooting sports.

I could be wrong, but we've been participating as Canada in shooting sports since the early 1900s, for sure.

Ms. Pam Damoff: The numbers I had were 16 in pistol shooting and 84 with long guns. We're not talking about a lot of people here, but there is an exemption for elite Olympic shooters like you, is there not?

Ms. Lynda Kiejko: Sure there is, but how do you become an elite pistol shooter without training? Do you just come off the street and say that you think you're going to be an Olympic volleyball player today? It takes years of training. You put years of work and effort into it.

There's the rule of about 10,000 hours to become an expert in anything, and yet we're going to limit the people who are allowed to have an exemption to people who are already champions, who are already winning and who are already Olympians. That means you get rid of the entire sport. How do you prove that you want to become a professional or an Olympian in something before you actually can prove that you are one?

Ms. Pam Damoff: What we're talking about are 16 people in the entire country, and right now it's just you.

Ms. Lynda Kiejko: You're talking about 16 people who have become Olympians. Do you understand how many other people are competing against them? There are a huge number of people competing against them.

I have teammates I train with all the time who have not yet made the Olympic level, yet you're going to restrict their equipment to say that they can never achieve that. That makes no sense. It's like telling soccer players that if they want to be a soccer player, they have to be an Olympic soccer player before they can actually have a ball. That's what you're saying.

• (1700)

Ms. Pam Damoff: It's not. Gun ranges are still allowed to import and buy pistols as well.

I think at some point we as a society need to decide which is more important. I do commend you for representing your country, and I thank you for doing that, but as a society we also need to look at whether we want to see handguns continue to proliferate in our country. You will still have the ability to use them, Ms. Kiejko, but our government has determined that we would like to see a handgun freeze, and that is supported by the vast majority of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

I'll leave it there, because I want to ask a question of our other witness.

Monsieur Renaud, I know you had concerns about the amendment, with the list of models that was put forward. Is there a definition that you think would be helpful to the government if we were to introduce an amendment?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Renaud: Okay, thank you.

I'm going to refer that question to Emily Vallée, our communications coordinator.

Ms. Emily Vallée (Communications Coordinator, Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs): We actually don't have a definition to recommend at this time. Rather, we think the first step should be to establish objective criteria in order to develop a definition. Also, we recommend that the hunting and sport shooting community be consulted, to make sure the definition is clear. We don't have any definitive solutions to propose as regards the definition.

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

[Translation]

Let's go to Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Michaud, you have six minutes.

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

Mr. Renaud and Ms. Vallée, thank you for accepting our invitation to join us today. I know Quebec's hunting community has been looking forward to your testimony.

Mr. Renaud, in your speech, you clearly stated that the bill has two main issues, namely that government amendments G-4 and G-46 weren't clear and that the public may lack knowledge about how firearms are classified. You think it would be better to use objective criteria or principles instead of criteria related to ergonomics, for example. That's something I've been thinking about too, and I'm wondering if there's another way to classify firearms.

Researcher Francis Langlois, a professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal, has made a very interesting suggestion, which is that firearms should be classified based on two criteria: first, the way they're handled, and second, their firing mechanism. I don't know if you've heard about this suggestion. In terms of handling, firearms could be divided into two categories, namely handguns and long guns. In terms of the firing mechanism, they would be divided into manual reloading versus semi-automatic loading. Just doing that would make the whole issue a bit clearer and could help the public tell the difference between prohibited firearms and exempt firearms. Do you have an opinion on that suggestion?

I advised the government to review Mr. Langlois' suggestion. Even if the bill is drafted differently, this could be an interesting solution for straightening it all out and making sure that a firearm that's commonly used for hunting in Quebec, or elsewhere in Canada, doesn't get banned. Take the SKS rifle, which was designed for military use. It would be obsolete in today's military context, so it could be used for hunting. It's not too expensive, and it's widely available. This classification would enable us to avoid lumping it in with firearms that are used for military purposes. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying the SKS should be exempt. I'm just wondering if there's a better way to classify these firearms and avoid lumping them all together.

I would love to hear what Mr. Renaud or Ms. Vallée has to say about that.

• (1705)

Mr. Marc Renaud: I will start and I'm sure Ms. Vallée will have comments to add.

The notions of prohibited weapons, restricted weapons and long guns already exist. Is it necessary to go that far? Would that make the amendments clearer? We can already clarify what the amendment says about firearms designed as military or large-capacity firearms. Those things are already regulated here. There are semi-automatic weapons that can hold almost five cartridges. If more objective criteria were adopted, without the need for making a list, it

would give hunters a better understanding of the situation. It would reassure them. If the proposed amendments become too complicated, all of our hunters will be worried. Laws already exist regarding cartridge capacity. The semi-automatic weapons sold in Canada cannot have a greater cartridge capacity.

Ms. Vallée can address the rest of what you said because I likely did not elaborate enough on Mr. Langlois's proposal.

Ms. Emily Vallée: I would not go as far as to say that I fully support Mr. Langlois's classification approach, but it is based on objective criteria. These are the types of criteria that we are asking for, criteria regarding the loading mechanism, whether it be semi-automatic or manual. That makes things very clear. Everyone can figure out what class a firearm belongs in just by looking at it.

These are the types of criteria that we support for the classification of firearms. That is an approach worth exploring.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you very much.

Mr. Renaud, we agree on one thing. You are saying that it might be simpler not to have a list. I told the government the same thing. If we are trying to come up with an evolving definition, then it should be good for firearms that already exist and for those that could arrive on the market in the future. We would not need to put everything on a list.

I also understand that the only list that will actually be continually updated is the RCMP's list and not necessarily the list set out in the Criminal Code. Having more than one list will also not help people to understand, in my opinion.

If we look a little closer at amendment G-4, it is easy to see that the first two parts of it target firearms that are already prohibited: firearms that are capable of discharging a projectile with muzzle energy exceeding 10,000 joules and firearms that have a bore diameter of 20 millimetres or greater—

[English]

The Chair: Madame Michaud, that's your time.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you. I'll come back to that later.

[English]

The Chair: To the witness, go ahead and answer, please. You get to answer.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I did not have time to ask my question, Mr. Chair. I will come back to it later.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. I have this horrible task of cutting people off when their time is up.

We'll go now to Mr. Julian.

Mr. Julian, go ahead please, for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. You are doing a great job. The time difference does not always make things easy.

Mr. Renaud, Ms. Vallée and Ms. Kiejko, thank you for your important testimony today.

I would like to speak first to Mr. Renaud and Ms. Vallée.

First, I commend you for the work you do to educate. Your website provides an enormous amount of information.

Earlier, you said that 60,000 participants take your training every year. Is that correct?

● (1710)

Mr. Marc Renaud: That's correct.

Mr. Peter Julian: That is impressive.

Given the important role that your organization plays in terms of education in Quebec, were you consulted when the bill was drafted or before amendments G-4 and G-46 were brought forward?

Were you consulted after the amendments were presented?

Mr. Marc Renaud: We were not consulted before the amendments were presented. When we saw the amendments, we asked to be heard and consulted. That is why we are saying that, even if the amendments come back in another form in the future, all of our members must be consulted.

Mr. Peter Julian: How was the consultation conducted?

After these amendments were presented, you said that they were problematic. As you probably know, the NDP worked hard to get those amendments withdrawn.

How did the government follow up with you when you indicated that the amendments were problematic?

Mr. Marc Renaud: The best person to answer that question is Ms. Vallée since she is part of the communications team.

Ms. Emily Vallée: We were contacted by Minister Mendicino's team and met with them in mid-January.

Mr. Peter Julian: At that meeting in mid-January, did you talk about the two concerns that you raised in your testimony, namely, that the list of weapons is confusing and that objective criteria should be implemented to address that issue?

In answer to Ms. Michaud's question, you talked about criteria that could be used. Did you discuss that at your meeting?

Ms. Emily Vallée: Yes, we did address that issue.

That being said, we had to ask a lot of questions first in order to be able to understand the amendments and the impacts of the definition, as well as to find out what part of the list was added in November 2022. The main purpose of the meeting was to gain a better understanding of things. Hunters and sport shooters did not have access to that information. If we put ourselves in their shoes, it is easy to see that it was basically impossible for them to feel reassured by such amendments.

We had the opportunity to get answers to our questions and to talk about the fact that the definition of an assault weapon must be clear and must not cause confusion.

We also addressed that fact that, if such a definition is accepted by the community following consultations, then it should be applied to the whole schedule of prohibited firearms. If we agree on what constitutes an assault weapon, then we would not have to work from a list.

Mr. Peter Julian: Did you get the impression that the government was trying to convince you that the amendments had merit?

Is that why you spent the first part of your meeting discussing how the amendments would work?

Ms. Emily Vallée: The purpose of the meeting was not to convince us. I think it was really to clarify things and to ask us our opinion so that we could have an open discussion on what the definition of an assault weapon should be.

● (1715)

Mr. Peter Julian: Did the government promise, either during or after the meeting, that it would consult you at a later stage?

Ms. Emily Vallée: Later, the government answered some remaining questions in writing, but there was no further consultation apart from the invitation to appear before the committee.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

How many members do you have?

Mr. Marc Renaud: We have 125,000 members and there are 220 member associations in Quebec, not counting all of the community partners. We therefore have a large group of members.

Mr. Peter Julian: Of those members, how many have a firearms possession and acquisition licence?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian. That wraps up our first round.

We will go now to our second round. We will start with Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Lloyd, please go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the Quebec hunters and anglers.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Lloyd, before you carry on, this will be a shortened round as well. There will be one slot for each party, as last time.

Go ahead.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: To the Quebec hunters and anglers, Minister Mendicino noted in a previous meeting that he's very concerned with the number of Canadians who are taking safety courses and becoming licensed firearm owners.

Do you share Minister Mendicino's concerns that people who are taking your courses and becoming licensed firearm owners pose a threat to public safety?

[Translation]

Ms. Emily Vallée: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Mr. Marc Renaud: If I understand correctly, you are asking us whether, like the federal Minister of Public Safety, we are concerned about the number of people who are taking firearms safety courses.

That is not the case. I am not concerned. That is a sign that Canadians care about using firearms safely. On the contrary, people think education is important—

[English]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you. I have a short time here.

It might surprise folks at the committee to learn that I think there is already an evergreen definition of assault firearms in this country, and that definition has been in place for a number of decades. Firearms that are fully automatic and that carry high-capacity magazines of more than five rounds are already illegal in this country.

Are you aware of that? Is that something that you and Quebec hunters are aware of?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Renaud: Yes, we know that there are classes of prohibited weapons. Large-capacity assault weapons are already prohibited in Canada. That is why—

[English]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Hunters and sport shooters do not have access to these kinds of firearms—assault weapons—today. Is that correct?

[Translation]

Ms. Emily Vallée: That is correct. They are illegal weapons.

[English]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Going into the evergreen definition that the government proposed, it said, “a firearm that is a rifle or shotgun, that is capable of discharging centre-fire ammunition in a semi-automatic manner and that is designed to accept a detachable cartridge magazine with a capacity greater than five cartridges of the type for which the firearm was originally designed”.

I think you and I can agree that we already know that in Canada it is illegal to have a magazine that carries more than five rounds, but when this amendment says it's any firearm that is capable of taking a magazine over five rounds, we're talking about a lot of semi-automatics here. Are we talking about a lot of hunting rifles and shotguns that would be banned by this amendment? Do you agree with that conclusion?

[Translation]

Ms. Emily Vallée: I could not give an exact number.

Mr. Marc Renaud: The amendments do not refer to semi-automatic weapons with a cartridge magazine that can hold more than five cartridges because they are already prohibited. However, they do talk about weapons designed to hold such cartridge magazines. There is a risk that many hunting weapons that are already regulated in terms of magazine cartridge capacity will be included, while military weapons will be excluded. That is why we are asking that you make the amendments more specific and that you remove certain parts of them.

[English]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Yes. That's my concern about the evergreen definition the Liberals proposed. It's that it would capture a lot of hunting rifles and shotguns, because even though magazines that carry over five rounds or cartridges are illegal in Canada, many of these firearms are designed in other countries without these restrictions to take magazines that would have over five rounds. Many commonly used hunting rifles and shotguns would have been banned if this amendment had gone forward.

That is a concern we have when writing an evergreen definition, and it's why I don't think it's necessary, because we already have an evergreen definition in this country that bans fully automatic select-fire firearms and that bans firearms with high-capacity magazines. This is an evergreen definition that has largely worked and that is politically not divisive in this country overall.

Now we're talking about going after semi-automatic rifles and shotguns that are widely used by hunters, as we've seen from a wide array of testimony. How does the government try to come back and narrow this evergreen definition? I just don't think they are capable of doing it, because any definition is going to be redundant. It's already going to capture the existing evergreen bans or it's going to capture a lot of legitimately and commonly used hunting rifles and shotguns.

This is going to impact the way of life of so many people. Is this going to impact the way of life for folks who go through your courses and folks who are part of your association? Is it going to impact your way of life should these amendments go through again?

• (1720)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Renaud: I wholeheartedly agree. We were surprised by these amendments because laws already exist. That is why this should be very clear if the government is going to propose new amendments.

I completely agree with you. This already exists. Is it necessary? It remains to be seen.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

[Translation]

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you for your testimony.

[English]

I will continue in English, because in this technical category I'm not as fluent, so forgive me.

For Monsieur Renaud, I've been engaging quite extensively with Yukon hunters. Many of the themes that you relate have been expressed in Yukon as well.

At the same time, I think everyone I've talked to has agreed that gun violence in Canada is an increasing problem, and that there is more to do in addressing gun violence in this country. It's a question of which of the avenues that remain incomplete we need to complete.

You made the point that you and others who are members—who have done the training and who have done the PAL—are among the most safe users of firearms in the country. I think we have to respect that.

At the same time, I know that when I was last on this committee I had a chance to talk with your Ontario counterpart, and I asked about the willingness to engage in the question of how we collaboratively address firearm safety and gun violence in the country. Even though you expressed that you haven't been consulted enough so far, are you willing to be a partner as we move ahead and try to fill in the gaps in gun safety in this country by working with groups that are working on all sides of this issue?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Renaud: Obviously, we feel it is very important that we be consulted. We will always be concerned about crime, both as individuals and as an association. However, what is the real objective or target of these amendments and Bill C-21? Clearly, legitimate gun owners are not the target. That is likely not the problem.

Do we need to be more specific? Does the government want to consult us and all the other federations as partners? The Canadian federation includes all of the provincial federations. We want to support the cause and help address crime as much as possible. That being said, part of that is up to police officers, who are also involved in this issue. There is a lot of education that needs to be done among all users, even though one has to wonder whether some of them are actually able to be educated.

In short, we are concerned about this as a federation. That is why we are saying that it is very important to consult hunting communities across Canada.

• (1725)

[English]

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

Just in following up, I believe that in your opening comments you said you were open to a permanent definition, as Madame Michaud has followed up on. I also want to follow up on the concept of assault-style weapons. We know automatic weapons are covered, but there are concerns about trying to arrive at some conclusion around how we define firearms that are potential weapons and that are not yet included.

You said that you're open to a definition, even though you yourself didn't have criteria to offer. Are there some criteria you would suggest for how we would arrive at an evergreen definition?

[Translation]

Ms. Emily Vallée: Indeed, we are suggesting certain criteria. First of all, we are open to the idea of creating a definition in order to remove the famous lists of prohibited firearms, which are added to, multiplied or extended from one bill to the next.

This is what we want to avoid by creating a definition on which everyone can agree. This definition could be based, among other things, on criteria such as those proposed by Francis Langlois, which were mentioned earlier. For example, there is the loading mechanism, the capacity of the firearm, that is, the number of cartridges it can hold, or the weapon's handling, which makes it possible to differentiate between long guns and handguns. These are all examples of very objective criteria that could be used.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Hanley.

[Translation]

We turn again to Ms. Michaud.

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

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

Mr. Renaud and Ms. Vallée, what I was trying to do earlier, in dissecting amendment G-4, which sought to amend Bill C-21, was to read it to you, because I suspect that you do not have it in front of you.

What I have heard from the Quebec hunting community in general is that there is a problem with paragraph (1.2)(g) proposed in amendment G-4.

Paragraphs (1.2)(e) and (1.2)(f) proposed in this amendment refer to weapons that are already prohibited by the Regulations Prescribing Certain Firearms and Other Weapons, Components and Parts of Weapons, Accessories, Cartridge Magazines, Ammunition and Projectiles as Prohibited, Restricted or Non-Restricted, as amended in 2020.

Paragraph (1.2)(h) refers to ghost or illegally manufactured firearms. I am sure we all agree that it is important to legislate on this.

As for paragraph (1.2)(i), it refers to the schedule.

If I refer to what Ms. Vallée has just said, ideally, there would be no list of firearms. So it could simply be deleted.

To return to paragraph (1.2)(g) of amendment G-4, which referred to “une arme à feu qui est un fusil semi-automatique ou un fusil de chasse semi-automatique”, or “a firearm that is a rifle or shotgun”, I believe that it contributed to people's confusion, at least in French. People understood that we wanted to ban “fusils de chasse”, when that was not necessarily the case.

If, in a new definition that the government would propose, we simply removed the reference to “fusil de chasse” in French—I know that it is not the same thing in English—do you think that would help the general understanding of what prohibited firearms are?

Mr. Marc Renaud: I would say that yes, we could remove the notion of “fusil de chasse”, but also the word “conçu”, because that word leads to interpretation problems. We could add “certaines armes”, that are used for hunting by certain people.

I agree that the terms “fusil de chasse” and “est conçu” are not very clear.

Ms. Vallée, you may have a comment to add.

Ms. Emily Vallée: To complete your idea in relation to the definition of a prohibited firearm, it is the fact of saying that the rifle “est conçu”, is designed, in a certain way that causes problems. It forces you to go and check the original blueprints of the firearm to find out which firearm is prohibited or not, which is impossible for ordinary citizens. This creates a lot of confusion. This is something that was pointed out to Minister Mendicino.

To come back to your question, the use of the term “fusil de chasse” was confusing from the start.

• (1730)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I don't know if I have any time left, Mr. Chair, but the term “conçu” that you mention—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: My time is up. Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry.

[English]

Mr. Julian, please go ahead for two and a half minutes. You have the final word.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I didn't get to finish my question in the last round. I will therefore ask it again to Mr. Renaud and Ms. Vallée.

You said that your association has 125,000 members. What percentage of your members hold a firearms possession and acquisition licence?

Mr. Marc Renaud: I am not in a position to answer that.

Firearms possession and acquisition licences are managed by the federal government. Unfortunately, I do not have any data on these licences. However, most hunters who buy licences hold a firearms possession and acquisition licence, or the owner of the firearm must be nearby.

So, unfortunately, I don't have the exact figure.

Mr. Peter Julian: However, you would say that the vast majority of hunters have one, would you not?

Mr. Marc Renaud: That is correct.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

I wanted to raise another issue that has been pointed out by police officers and other people in the community, namely the issue of ghost guns.

Right now, because of some of the loopholes in the legislation, people can buy gun parts and cartridges and even own them. Of course, they need a possession and acquisition licence, but ownership is not required. Therefore, people who have criminal tendencies can circumvent the existing laws at the moment.

Your organization is made up of responsible people. We can also see that you take your responsibilities seriously by offering awareness programs every year.

What do your members think and what do you think of this increasingly frequent situation where criminals use ghost guns without complying with the existing regulatory framework, by holding, for example, a firearms possession and acquisition licence?

Mr. Marc Renaud: Initially, we have to work with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to issue permits if people have obtained firearms legally. However, if the firearms are illegal, that is a criminal matter. So we do not need an amended bill that harms hunters and sport shooters when the problem is one of crime. It is up to the police to act and enforce the laws in these cases.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay, but the problem is that there are no such laws—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Wrap up very quickly.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: There is no law dealing with that. Right now, you can buy or possess cartridges and buy firearm parts legally without a licence.

Mr. Marc Renaud: You can buy ammunition or firearms legally, according to the legal rules that already exist in Canada. If a firearm, assembled piece by piece, becomes an illegal firearm, the owner does not have the right to possess it. It is an illegal firearm, and hunters are not in possession of illegal firearms.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

I'm afraid we have to wrap up at this point.

I would like to thank our panel of witnesses. You've been very helpful. It's a very difficult subject, and we appreciate your time and expertise.

With that, the meeting is now adjourned. Thank you all.

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