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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Bill No. 161 – *The Wildlife Amendment Act, 2014*

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter into the debate on Bill No. 161, *An Act to amend The Wildlife Act, 1998*. And this is a very important bill, Mr. Speaker, a very important bill before us. It's one, you know, it's interesting as we travel about and we run into people, and it doesn't matter where you are. It's always somebody you run into who knows of Saskatchewan. Probably the thing that they know is hunting. And it's funny how that goes.

It's something that we are well known for and we have a lot to be proud of in terms of our abundance of wildlife and what that means for hunting and fishing and our reputation, right across, right across North America and even into Mexico. You know, I mean it's amazing what people think of when they think of Saskatchewan.

I mean really it's interesting now because we are so diversified, whether it's the farming aspect, whether it's the mining, the oil, some of our amazing people who've gone on to do amazing things around the world. But somehow the wildlife in Saskatchewan just connects the natural beauty of our province, connects with so many people around the world. And so this is an important piece of legislation before us. And it's important that we get it right. And I know that I'll take a minute to talk about the minister's comments to make sure we don't miss something. And it's one that we'll have a lot of questions in committee.

It's one of those bills that we have to make sure we have the appropriate and due process in terms of consultation. This is above and beyond what would be mandatory in a usual sense of making sure we talk to the stakeholders, that that makes sense whether it's wildlife advisory committee or whether it's Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation. All of these folks have an important stake, and there's so many of them. But of course as well, we need to make sure that we consult with our First Nations and Métis constituents because this is a basic right for them, that they have the ability to continue to hunt and fish in a sustainable way. And so the implications for this are very strong, and so we want

to make sure we get that right.

Now we understand that the intent of the bill really in many ways is to modernize some of our older habits, and some of these include requiring scientists studying animals to get a licence from the government. Now we'll be watching this carefully to make sure that there is no impediment and no barrier in place. I know that sometimes people feel that when you . . . The science or the research particularly on species at risk can be an impediment to progress. We want to make sure that people have the best practices so that we have the best science and the best information. That's really, really important.

We also know this bill updates the . . . And now it reflects the fact that licensing has been outsourced to a single electronic vendor, which has caused issues, and we've often wondered whether this is the best practice going forward. The debate is still out there on that. I think that we sometimes overlook the ability to buy licences from a local vendor and what that meant for the local economy. We'll have questions about that. Has there been a study about the impact of going to a single electronic vendor? What has been the pros and cons? Now that we've done that, what has been the impact of that? And we really worry about that, so we want to make sure that information's out there.

So it also increases the limitation period for prosecutions to three years, and this gives more time for the province to press charges against poachers — hugely important. I think this is important when we know that we don't want to see any legislation, any court proceedings lost because of inadequate time to prepare cases, particularly when there may be a delay in getting information. These can be quite complex cases, and we want to make sure we have cases that go before the courts in a really solid, solid manner. And that's really hugely, hugely important that we don't inadvertently lose these cases. But I think, you know, I mean it sends a mixed message, and so we want to make sure that's really important.

It changes the rules around hunting licence suspensions. Under the current Act, a person who breaks the law has their licence suspended for a period of time and has to pay the fine once the suspension period is over. And it seems the offender now could purchase a licence even if the fine is unpaid. So we now make sure it's clear and that it is the law that the offender must wait until the suspension is over and pay the fine before they can buy another licence. And it also creates a lifetime ban on hunting for people with three serious offences, and we'll be watching how that plays out. That's a hugely important piece of legislation and what that means.

We'll be interested to know, and I have some questions about how the information sharing will be between provinces, whether there's an implication of cross-border infractions, whether somebody who breaks the law here two times, then goes over to Alberta and does their hunting, whether there's been any communications back and forth about that. And what were those discussions about that? And it really is an important one because wildlife does not respect borders. Obviously they're moving across border, so it only makes sense that we have legislation that would follow that.

And so while it seems the bill has a lot of good pieces, again this is one around

consultation. Were there other pieces that groups asked for, and what did they bring forward? In terms of public consultation, was there any public consultation on this? And were there things that were left out that now that we have the opportunity to amend the legislation, amend *The Wildlife Act*? You don't want to be opening these things up every year and response, like a knee-jerk response to a lobby group. Clearly this is one where you might say, yes, they're very, very worthwhile pieces of, well-informed pieces of legislation, but is it the complete package? Are there some unintentional consequences here? What was the consultation process like? Is it, was it full? Was it complete? Did people get a chance to really think about the implications of this legislation? And as I said, while the government says that there may not be any implications for First Nations and Métis in this bill, I think that they would like to put that opinion out themselves as opposed to wait for the government to say that. And so we have some, we'll have some questions about that.

I just want to make some, a quick review of what the minister said because I think it's important that his comments give us a sense of the direction of the government. And I think it's an important piece of legislation. And so it talks about, he talks about "The proposed amendments considered today will clarify the licensing authority for scientific permits to ensure wildlife research is conducted responsibly." Now he talks responsibly. I know that the university has used the word "ethically." I wonder if there's a choice in that language. It would be interesting to know where the universities are coming down on this in terms of what do they do when they're proving doctoral work or master's work or ongoing work like this? So it will be interesting to see how this plays out.

And you know, when I think and I look back at the Great Sand Hills research study — that was one by the Canadian plains research unit at the University of Regina; outstanding, outstanding work there — I'm not sure what the story was about licensing there, and it would be interesting to hear the narrative on that, whether that was done without licence, and is that something they've learned from. Or is this something that's maybe done, say, for Ducks Unlimited? Is this something that Ducks Unlimited would be doing for their own private research that may not be publicly released? So it will be interesting to hear more about that.

Interestingly when we did the Great Sand Hills research, we tasked the First Nations and they stepped up and did a major, significant part of this study in terms of the implications for First Nations. And it would be interesting to know how this would fit into that in terms of the interconnections between wildlife and First Nations. Because I mean the interesting thing about this is the implication that wildlife exists only by itself and how it might grow, how it might flourish, that type of thing. But clearly it's part of an ecosystem and whether that involves the First Nations, Métis, or whether it involves being close to an urban setting, all of that takes some consideration. So I think it'd be very interesting to hear more about that. The minister spoke just briefly about it. We'll have questions at length about that. So I think we'll look forward to committee on that.

It talks about improving legislative authority to manage vendor responsibility, hunting and angling issuance, and the implementation of additional hunting suspensions to increase the protection of wildlife resources here. And it also, and I've talked about this,

lengthens the amount of time wildlife officers have to bring charges forward for wildlife violations.

So again I want to just flag this, that I'm curious, and I know we're curious on this side: what has been the impact of the out-of-province automated licensing from a single vendor? And what has been the cost implications, whether it's been positive or negative? What has been the impact it's had on local communities across our province in terms of those mom-and-pop operations that used to issue fishing licences and hunting licences? What is the impact on that?

And what has been the impact in terms of privacy? You know, I mean my good colleague here from Regina Rosemont raised the issue around the *PATRIOT* [Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism] *Act*. Once we start shipping our information out of the province, particularly into the States, and particularly when it comes to information around guns, the American government may have, may have some interest in that. And so we would like to hear if the government's done any study on that and whether they have any information about that to share or whether that was an ideological thing that this government did in terms of their budgetary processes a few years ago.

So I think this will be very, very important, you know. It talks about prescribing licensing provisions for scientific or research processes that require the taking or disturbing of wildlife. Many research surveys, especially those involving species at risk, using non-obtrusive detection efforts such as monitoring songbirds, passive wildlife observation, use of presence-absence surveys, the Act didn't really speak to that and now it will so it will be . . . But he chooses the language of responsible and undistruptive manner and I'm just curious because in an academic setting the word would have been an ethical process and I would throw out this word, sustainable. But ethical is a big part of academic research and whether you're dealing with human research or otherwise, there's always the ethical approach and I think this is an important way.

And it would also be interesting to know in terms of the social impact of these studies, will there be an opportunity for the public to have access? As I said, sometimes there is private research that might be done and whether it's done by an NGO [non-governmental organization] like a non-government organization like Ducks Unlimited that's doing their own work for their areas or the Wildlife Federation or the Nature Conservancy, whether these will be done in a way that there is some social impact that the rest of us will understand.

And then he talks about the government entering into an agreement to deliver Saskatchewan automated hunting, angling, and trapping licence and sales and now it's authorized and so they're working on that. But again I would like to know whether there's been any kind of business review of that.

He goes on and talks about the suspension of hunting privileges for most wildlife violations includes one-year suspensions from hunting or trapping and whether that's now been increased. That's really, really important.

Now he talks about a key message from hunters during the red tape reduction committee which took place in the spring of 2012, was to do more to conserve our wildlife resource. And so this is really, really important that they talk about the implications of making sure your fine is paid and your suspension is carried out. And individuals who are suspended from hunting activities in other jurisdictions will not be able to purchase a licence in the province of Saskatchewan.

So again, this will be interesting to know how are they tracking that and if it's an out-of-country, an American vendor who's looking after this tracking, it makes for an interesting position that we find ourselves in that we have an out-of-country vendor looking after us, keeping track of our violations. And so that'll be of some interest for sure.

And I think this will be interesting because then does that block us from having a different vendor than Alberta or Manitoba or British Columbia, Ontario? Because if it's just an automatic, you're blocked if your licence is suspended, how does this work? Is there one national vendor for all of Canada? How do we enter into this, bids for the right to be the vendor if there has to be some interprovincial connection? So this will be interesting to hear how this plays out.

Now he talks about the final measure proposed to demonstrate commitment to our wildlife, but they're talking about making sure that we do more and that we can collect evidence and making sure that we have the evidence all well in place.

Actually interesting, he talks about poaching gangs are becoming more and more sophisticated, difficult to catch, often requiring undercover operations to collect evidence to support prosecution. So this is an evolution that is a challenge. And we have to make sure we rise to that challenge, and we have the proper tools that our enforcement agencies can use.

And he goes on to talk about that we won't have to really do much more in terms of training for our wildlife conservation officers, that it will be in place. We want to make sure that it is the best that we can have right across Canada, that it is outstanding legislation. And so we'll have many questions about this. And as I said, he talks about how amendments to *The Wildlife Act* can be implemented without affecting First Nations, existing First Nations and Métis hunting rights in our province. So that's a pretty major statement, and we want to make sure that it's accurate and that actually First Nations feel much the same.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know that this is a piece of legislation that really talks about how we think of our natural environment, our ecosystems, and that we do have the best protection in place and we do have the appropriate tools that the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Environment feels they need to have in place, and our conservation officers who do an amazing job, an amazing job, feel that they can carry out the tasks that they are required to do.

And as the minister alludes, and we'll hear more about this in committee, about the challenges, whether it's poaching gangs that we see now and interprovincial travel

between hunters who've lost their licences and may be suspended — all of this is one that we feel really requires our attention.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I know that we'll have much more to say on this over the course of time. But from my point of view . . . There will be others that will want to speak to this Act for sure, and so I'd like to move adjournment now of Bill No. 161, *An Act to amend The Wildlife Act, 1998*. Thank you very much.