

Nova Scotia

# Environmentalists, forestry industry agree biodiversity bill needs changes



Liberals use their majority to move Bill 116 back to the legislature floor unamended

[Jean Laroche](#) · CBC News · Posted: Mar 25, 2019 8:09 PM AT | Last Updated: March 25



It was standing-room only for meeting of law amendments committee on Monday. (Jean Laroche/CBC)

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Environmentalists, woodlot owners and forestry company representatives were united in calling for changes to the measures being proposed by the McNeil government [to protect Nova Scotia's biodiversity](#), but Bill 116 is headed back to the floor of the legislature without amendment.

That's because Liberal members on the law amendments committee used their majority to defeat a motion by Progressive Conservative MLA Tory Rushton to send the Biodiversity Act back to the Department of Lands and Forestry to mull over what it was told Monday afternoon.

In all, eight individuals spoke out in favour of the bill in principle, but all had suggestions to make provisions either stronger or more clear.

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Debbie Reeves is a sixth generation woodlot owner. (Jean Laroche/CBC)

Debbie Reeves, who called herself a sixth generation woodlot owner in Lunenburg and Kings counties, told the committee she was worried the proposed law gave Lands and Forestry

Minister Iain Rankin too much power.

"This act is overreaching and everything is biodiversity," Reeves said.

"This could result in unintended consequences, such as even stopping us from cutting dying fir trees as it could provide habitat for some types of bugs, or stop Christmas tree growers from planting genetic modified seedlings."



Andrew Fedora, a board member of Forest Nova Scotia, said the bill puts the rights of private land owners at risk. (Jean Laroche/CBC)

That sentiment was echoed by Andrew Fedora, who spoke on behalf of Forest Nova Scotia, the main forestry industry lobby group in the province.

He pointed to section 31 of the act which spells out the proposed law's offenses and penalties, including the "harvesting, taking or killing of a species in excess of that prescribed by the regulations."

"It appears that this applies to activities on all lands, Crown and private," Fedora told the committee.

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"This threatens the livelihood and the rights of private land owners who should have a choice in what happens on their lands."





Lisa Mitchell is the executive director of the East Coast Environmental Law Association. (Jean Laroche/CBC)

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Those who wanted greater protective measures were united in asking for changes to the law that would push Rankin to do more.

Group after group called for a number of words in the act to be changed from "may" to "shall," including "the Minister shall establish or adopt goals or targets for biodiversity and indicators."

"Setting goals and targets is not only at the core of the [United Nations] Convention on Biological Diversity, which Canada was the first to sign in 1992 ... but it's the primary means of moving toward improving our understanding about biodiversity and ultimately creating sustainable, workable solutions," Lisa Mitchell, executive director of the East Coast Environmental Law Association, told the committee.





Sarah Kingsbury, a graduate student at Saint Mary's University, said the bill doesn't take a strong enough stance on invasive species. (Jean Laroche/CBC)

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Sarah Kingsbury, a graduate student at Saint Mary's University, urged the committee to amend the law to better protect the province against invasive species — a measure that only rated a one-word mention in the law as it is currently written.

"Without the proper funding, moderating programs, public education programs and governmental regulation oversight, Nova Scotia will continue to be a hotspot for invasives," said Kingsbury. "Currently our situation is poor."

"There is no consistent source of training, funding or education that we can point to and say this is for invasive species research or for monitoring the threat and spread of invasive species," she said.





Saint Mary's University graduate student Sarah Kingsbury brought an invasive Chinese mystery snail to illustrate the kind of invasive species currently threatening Nova Scotia's biodiversity. (Jean Laroche/CBC)

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Despite pleas from the eight presenters to amend the bill, Liberal members rejected a motion to send Bill 166 back to be reworked.

Before the committee voted, New Democrat MLA Susan Leblanc implored her Liberal colleagues to temporarily shelve the bill.

"I feel like this is a trend with our current government ...just to push a bill through and then deal with the problems later," she said.

"This is an extremely serious matter, the biodiversity of our province."

After the vote, Fedora told reporters Forest Nova Scotia would continue to push for changes to the bill.

"It's a very important piece of legislation and it's very important that we get it right," he said.

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