



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

ENVI • NUMBER 063 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, March 5, 2013

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Chair

Mr. Harold Albrecht

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC)): I'd like call to order meeting number 63 of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

Today, we're dealing with supplementary estimates (C) 2012-13, votes 1c and 10c under Environment. We're also dealing at the same time with the main estimates, Standing Order 81(4), votes 1, 5, 10, 15, and 20.

It's great to have Minister Kent with us today.

Minister Kent, welcome, and welcome to your witnesses who are joining you today: Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Latourelle, and Ms. Feldman.

Mr. Kent, we're going to proceed with your opening comments. Thank you for providing them for us in written form. The floor is yours.

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members. Good morning.

[Translation]

Good morning, everyone.

[English]

Mr. Chair, I will start by expressing my sincere appreciation to the committee for the invitation to appear here once again to discuss the supplementary estimates (C) for fiscal 2012-13 and the main estimates for 2013-14.

As you said, joining me at the table this morning are my deputy minister, the Deputy Minister of Environment Canada, Bob Hamilton; Alan Latourelle, the CEO of Parks Canada; and Elaine Feldman, President of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency.

[Translation]

As usual, I will begin with a brief statement and after that, I would be pleased to answer any questions that honourable members may have of me.

[English]

As you know, time has passed very quickly over the past couple of years since I took over my role as Canada's Minister of the Environment. During this time I have been privileged to see many of the proposals presented in these estimates come full circle as they develop into successful initiatives and grow into achievements for our environment and our economy.

Environment Canada's job, of course, is to help ensure Canadians have a clean, safe, and sustainable environment. The department achieves these goals largely through its collaborative work to develop, monitor, and enforce effective federal regulations and legislation. It is proceeding in a consistent, systematic, science-based manner, taking responsible actions across a range of issues, from climate change, to air and water quality, to the conservation of ecosystems, and to protecting Canadians from harmful chemicals.

The department delivers important services to Canadians 24 hours a day, every day. On average, the department issues 1.5 million public forecasts every year. It conducts more than 8,600 inspections and over 340 prosecutions for violations of environmental laws. It also publishes over 700 peer-reviewed scientific publications.

In terms of protected areas, Canada now protects almost 10% of our land mass, which means our nation is about 60% of the way to meeting the 2010 international target of protecting 17% of our land mass in protected areas. The Government of Canada is helping our nation to achieve this target. Environment Canada's collaborations with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and with other organizations have resulted in the protection of more than 338,000 hectares, including habitat for 126 species at risk. Since 2006, the Government of Canada has taken actions that will add almost 150,000 square kilometres to Parks Canada's network of protected areas, which is a 53% increase.

[Translation]

Working in collaboration with the United States, we enhanced and renewed the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, reinforcing ongoing efforts to deal with harmful algae, toxic chemicals and discharges from vessels using the lakes. We also added new provisions addressing issues such as aquatic invasive species, habitat degradation and the effects of climate change.

[English]

Our action plan for clean water is enabling large-scale investments to ensure clean water for Canadians. Last year, we contributed \$46.3 million toward the cleanup of Randle Reef in Hamilton Harbour and we launched the Great Lakes nutrient initiative, investing \$16 million over four years to address the re-emergence of toxic and nuisance algae caused by excessive phosphorous discharges to Lake Erie.

On the international stage, we are focused on achieving a new, legally binding global agreement on climate change that covers all major emitters. We are honouring our United Nations commitments under the Copenhagen accord by implementing a domestic regulatory plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We are also showing leadership, I believe, in the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to address short-lived climate pollutants.

[*Translation*]

We are advancing on our sector-by-sector regulatory approach at home, putting forward greenhouse gas regulations to significantly reduce emissions from cars and light trucks, heavy duty vehicles, and coal-fired electricity.

● (0850)

[*English*]

Our actions, combined with provincial, territorial, and business efforts, are projected to bring Canada halfway to achieving our Copenhagen target of a 17% reduction from 2005 levels by 2020. Moving forward, we're working towards achieving additional reductions from other sectors of the economy, focusing now on the oil and gas sector.

Our work is not done by any means, but these achievements I believe make it clear that we are on the right track. These estimates before us today signal continued efforts to continue that progress. As the chair said, today we're discussing two sets of estimates: the supplementary estimates (C) for fiscal 2012-13 and the main estimates for fiscal 2013-14.

The 2012-13 supplementary estimates (C) are the last set of budget adjustments to Environment Canada's reference levels for fiscal 2012-13.

In these estimates, Environment Canada is requesting \$24 million in funding for the Nature Conservancy of Canada to help the organization continue its important work to secure ecologically sensitive lands and to protect diverse ecosystems.

The department is also asking for \$21.3 million for grants and contributions. This includes more than \$21 million for the international climate change strategy 2012 fast-start financing. It includes a request for just over \$511,000 to renew the Lake Simcoe initiative program, which sunset in March 2012. This funding will allow for continued progress on addressing Lake Simcoe water quality. The supplementary estimates also include a reduction of \$12.5 million introduced in budget 2012 savings measures.

For supplementary estimates (C) 2012-13, Parks Canada is requesting \$3.9 million in funding for two items. This includes \$2.1 million for the development of the Rouge National Urban Park and \$1.8 million in funding for Canada's fast-start financing commitments under the Copenhagen Accord. These spending requests are offset by savings that Parks Canada identified in budget 2012.

Now let's move forward to the main estimates for Environment Canada for fiscal 2013-14. The net amount for the 2013-14 main estimates works out to \$959.4 million, which is 1.4% or \$13.3 million less when compared to last year's main estimates.

[*Translation*]

The major changes reflected in these estimates are proposed savings of \$31.5 million that follow up on savings measures announced in Budget 2012 and the sunset of \$1.6 million for the Renewable Fuels Regulations.

[*English*]

The estimates also request \$20.8 million in renewal funding for three programs: \$12.5 million to renew the Species at Risk Act program; \$4.2 million to renew the Lake Winnipeg Basin initiative; and \$4.1 million to go towards implementation of the Great Lakes nutrient Initiative.

For Parks Canada, its 2013-14 main estimates total \$597 million, which is a \$51.2-million decrease from last fiscal year's main estimates. Parks Canada identified \$19.7 million in savings as part of budget 2012. This difference also includes a \$15-million reduction from last year due to work that has been completed on the Trans-Canada Highway in Banff National Park.

The 2013-14 main estimates for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency total \$31 million, which is \$14 million more than the \$17 million in its main estimates last fiscal. The difference reflects funding that was originally slated to sunset but was renewed under budget 2012, which is as follows: \$7.4 million to enable efficient and effective regulatory reviews of major resource projects and advance government-wide efforts to modernize the regulatory system for major resource projects, as well as \$6.6 million to support consultations with aboriginal peoples during environmental assessments of major development projects.

Mr. Chair, this highlights some of the objectives that these estimates will support in the portfolio's work to provide Canadians with a clean, safe, and sustainable environment.

I would like to thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome to the chair of this committee.

I'd be happy to take questions at this time.

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Kent.

As the committee is aware, we'll proceed now to four rounds of seven minutes each, beginning with the government side.

I believe Mr. Toet has the floor.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister. It's always a pleasure to have you join us and to talk about our main estimates and supplementary estimates.

I wanted to highlight this a little bit initially to make sure we have this clear for me in my own mind, but I think it's also good for the discussion as we go forward here to understand the process on main estimates and supplementary estimates, etc.

I know the federal process works quite differently from the provincial process, which some of us may be used to. The provincial process has a system where your budget, your estimates of revenue, and your estimates of expenditure essentially all come out at the same time each and every year, so it's very fair to compare from year to year your estimates of expenditures from one document to another.

By federal law, the federal government has to have its expenditures put out by March 1. They have to be shown for the following fiscal year. Quite often, as is the case this year, that is before a budget is actually tabled.

From my understanding, we cannot have anything in main estimates that may come in a future budget but is not in a budget as of today. We have to be looking at estimates based on essentially the previous year's budget that came out. That can make some real challenges for us as we try to compare a main estimate from one year to a main estimate from another year. In fact to a large degree I would say we're trying to compare an apple and an orange lots of times, which gets us in a lot of hot water. I think it's good to set that out.

In fact the savings identified, for example, in budget 2012 cannot be reflected at all in these particular main estimates, because those are things that were brought forward afterward. There are changes and adjustments constantly being made. Again I think it's worth reiterating the fact that it's basically fundamentally flawed to compare main estimate to main estimate, because you have not taken into account your supplementaries, your changes, and your new upcoming budget that will have a major effect typically on the main estimates that have come out at this point today.

Again I think that's the parameter we really want to approach this from and make sure we're not trying to compare an apple and an orange, but compare what's really happening in programs and what the estimates reflect as of today with the knowledge that there are going to be changes.

We know we're dealing with supplementaries (C) here, which are asking for more funding on several fronts. Two examples are \$24 million for the Nature Conservancy and \$21.1 million for the international climate change strategy 2012. These are items that did come forward in 2012 that wouldn't have shown in estimates 2012. I think it's important we have that context as we go forward in these discussions.

Maybe you could comment on that, and let me know if I am on the right track in my understanding of that.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you.

You're absolutely correct. It is what it is. The budget process and the supplementary estimates process are significantly different from many provincial budget processes. The mains are not a budget, and

sometimes there is some confusion about the provision for programs that have sunsetted and that may or may not be reconsidered for renewal in the budget, which is still some weeks ahead of us.

The main estimates do have three main parts, though. I won't go too deeply into this, but they provide, as you said, the overview for federal spending and summarize the relationship of the key elements of the main estimates. They directly support the Appropriation Acts, again, these estimates having been tabled by the President of the Treasury Board. Part III is, as you have said and as I've outlined, departmental expenditure plans divided into reports on plans and priorities, which are about to come up; individual expenditure plans for each department and agency excluding our crown corporations, of course; and departmental performance reports, which are individual department and agency accounts of results achieved against the planned performance expectation sent out in the RPPs.

Then again in addition to and after the budget, the department has the opportunity through the year with the supplementary estimates to revise spending levels, which allows us to seek authority for spending levels as the year goes on and at different stages in the year. Second they allow us to report to Parliament with information on changes in estimated expenditures and to come to committee to discuss these changes, as I'm always glad to do.

I would reinforce again that a misunderstanding that often occurs is that this is the budget, but in fact it is not. Some of the questions I'm sure that will be posed here today will have to wait until the budget to be appropriately answered.

● (0900)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Thank you so much for that.

I just want to also touch quickly on two items I see in here of great significance. They are the renewal of the Lake Winnipeg Basin initiative and the implementation of the Great Lakes nutrient initiative, two extremely important initiatives. I have a small bias, being from Manitoba, toward the Lake Winnipeg initiative. Maybe you could speak to those initiatives and the importance of them, because they're extremely important.

The water quality in our Great Lakes and in Lake Winnipeg is really symptomatic and needs to be addressed. I'm very happy to see our government putting funding toward making sure we're looking at these areas that we can deal with and making sure we do, going forward, have good, clean water in these major lakes.

Hon. Peter Kent: Well, thank you very much.

You're absolutely right. Lake Winnipeg represents a significant continuing challenge and a challenge that's been with us for many years. Last year in budget 2012 we announced an additional investment of \$18 million over five years for the second phase of the initiative. It will continue to build on the successes that were made in the first phase, with regard to addressing the really significant challenges of restoring the ecological health and balance of Lake Winnipeg. It is, first and foremost, a nutrient-loading problem, but it is also a problem that has become so massively installed in the lake that the answers are not as easy to find and the restoration of that balance is not as easy as some would wish.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kent. I'm going to have to ask you to add that on to another question. We're a little bit over time.

I do want to thank Mr. Toet for bringing attention to this. I'm sure all of you have this from cover to cover. There's really good introductory material that helps us to know the summary that Mr. Toet gave us.

Ms. Leslie.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

It's very nice to see you here, Minister Kent, and your colleagues. Welcome back. It's always a pleasure to have you here. It is such a pleasure to have you here that actually my first question is that I'm offering an invitation to come back.

You and Mr. Toet discussed part of the process here, and my first question is about the process, because as you know, part of the main estimates, the report on priorities, has not yet been tabled. It is challenging to really get into the main estimates, so I'm wondering if you would be willing to come back once that report has been tabled.

• (0905)

Hon. Peter Kent: Yes.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Wonderful, and we'll welcome you back.

My next question is about the climate change and clean air line item. There is a decrease, as you know, of \$14 million there. Despite that, we are still waiting for oil and gas regulations. Your department currently projects a 113-million tonne gap between our emissions in 2020 and Canada's 2020 target. In the sector-by-sector approach, obviously oil and gas is the biggest piece of the pie that's left when it comes to controlling emissions to close that gap.

When can we expect to see those regulations? You've said in the House that they're coming soon. Do we have an idea of a date?

Hon. Peter Kent: We don't have a precise date. You'll appreciate that the writing of these regulations—the preparations, the scientific analysis, working with stakeholders, working with partners, working with industry—does consume time. We saw that in the writing of the original recommendations for the transportation sector. Again, that was doubly challenging in the sense that we were working with the United States EPA to make sure that the tailpipe emission regulations were aligned.

The coal-fired electricity sector regulations took somewhat longer than we thought because the consultation process between *Canada Gazette I* and *Canada Gazette II* was lengthened by the volume of interventions we had and reconsiderations that the provinces, industry, and stakeholders asked us to consider.

We've been working since the fall of 2011 on the oil and gas regulations. We deeply engaged last summer and we are now in the final stages, but what we're trying to do is ensure that the draft 1 regulations are as close to having agreement as possible so that we don't have a prolonged consultation period before we can publish the final regulations, the final draft 2.

Ms. Megan Leslie: I understand it is a lengthy process and there is a lot of negotiation that's going on, and evidence before us changes. So do you expect that these regulations will actually make real headway when it comes to closing that gap? Can you commit that those regulations will actually help close that gap in a substantial way?

Hon. Peter Kent: That is our objective, and as I said, we are in the final stages now of setting the stringency levels, and I would hope that certainly by mid-year we would be in a position to share those.

Ms. Megan Leslie: By mid-year, that's great news. Thanks.

My next question is about species at risk. When you were last at this committee I asked a question about progress on species at risk and you forwarded a letter to committee. The letter specifically stated that we still have 257 species that don't have a recovery document posted on the public registry. In these estimates in your opening statement, you talked about \$12.5 million for the renewal of species at risk. What does that mean exactly, “renewal of species at risk”?

Do you have plans to introduce amendments to this law? Is that what that means?

Hon. Peter Kent: That funding is for the continuing operations of the species at risk program.

As you know, there has been some discussion. There have been requests from a variety of quarters suggesting reconsideration of this still very young piece of legislation, the Species at Risk Act, that it be examined to see if changes are required, either in practices in terms of application of the act or in legislative changes to address unintended errors that were made in the original drafting of the act.

Ms. Megan Leslie: So renewal means—

Hon. Peter Kent: This has come from even some of the drafters. So we're examining this, we're talking with stakeholders, first nations, NGOs, the hunting and angling advisory panel. So across the spectrum of stakeholder groups, we are considering whether or not legislative changes might be required or simply changes in practice in application of the act.

• (0910)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thanks for that information. I appreciate it.

I have a question about a particular Environment Canada office, the Environment Canada office in North Bay. I'm wondering if there are plans to eliminate certain positions there, or transfer those positions out, or if there are plans to close that office.

Hon. Peter Kent: First of all, there are no plans to close the office in North Bay, but as with all of our regional offices—and depending on levels of activity and some of the benefits and efficiencies that we have seen in the past year in terms of consolidation of some positions in some of these offices—that does remain a possibility. But I can assure you there are no plans at the moment to close the North Bay office.

Ms. Megan Leslie: I can't remember the word you used. Was it restructuring?

Hon. Peter Kent: Consolidating.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Consolidating, yes.

Hon. Peter Kent: Streamlining? Is that the word?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thank you. Yes. I should know that word by now.

Are you able to tell us if there are plans specifically about that office to move positions out? I'm thinking in particular of the enforcement positions there that are responsible, for example, during a fire, that are responsible for spills in that area. What are the plans with those positions?

Hon. Peter Kent: Well, as you know, we're very much focused on the potential development of the Ring of Fire, and we recognize the need for enforcement as well as other oversight and engagement responsibilities there. But at the moment there are no changes that I could share with you now. But again, with regard to efficiency that we found in the enforcement area in the past year—and you may have heard me remark on this—we have found efficiencies in aligning enforcement capabilities within Parks Canada as well as within Environment Canada. So some efficiencies have been found there, but the responsibilities with regard to enforcement, I believe, have not been diminished.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I'd like to move now to Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, Minister, for your time in coming out today.

I too am interested in the progress that we've made on some of our greenhouse gas emission regulations, and specifically, I was hoping you could speak a little bit to the heavy-duty vehicle regulations that we just put in place. One of the things that I think we've been trying to do is also ensure that there's a positive impact to consumers. You spoke about the need to consult a wide variety of stakeholders in the development of regulations. Obviously, looking at things like impact on consumers, impact of supply and demand on various services is part of the modelling for these regulations.

Could you speak a bit about the heavy-duty vehicle regs and the importance of taking time to look at things such as pricing, supply, etc., when considering further regulations in other sectors?

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you. Those are all questions that are taken into consideration as we move through the sector-by-sector regulatory process.

With regard to transportation, I can't remind Canadians often enough that the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada is the transportation sector, which produces fully 25% of our annual GHGs.

After addressing cars and light trucks with regulations, first from 2011 to 2016, and recently 2017 to 2025, we brought in heavy-duty regulations for full-sized pickup trucks, heavy vehicles, tractor-trailer units, and what are called "vocational trucks", that is, garbage trucks and a variety of heavy-duty service vehicles. I was delighted that these regulations were welcomed by the trucking industry a week ago when we made the announcement. They achieve significant reductions in our GHG reduction targets, and we estimate that between model years 2014 and 2018 we will reduce GHG emissions from this heavy-truck category by fully 50%. At the same

time, fuel consumption will be reduced by 50% and the operators of these heavy-duty tractor vehicles will see savings to the tune of about \$8,000 a year.

As we publish these regulations, going sector-by-sector in the regulatory impact analysis statements, we always recognize there are some costs. But in every sector that we have regulated so far, the benefits have outweighed the costs by billions of dollars, on the order of 4:1 to 6:1.

I should come back and say that GHG reduction from the heavy-truck sector is 23% but the fuel savings are almost 50%.

There has been some comment from some quarters asking why our heavy-truck regulations, which are aligned with those of the Americans, came in two years after the American announcement. The answer to that is we have very different regulatory circumstances in Canada. We have to work with the provinces and address climate and road differences in the vast expanses of Canada, and we wanted to make sure that we got it right. We are now aligned, and I was delighted that the industry issued its support for the regs.

• (0915)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: If I may, I'll just switch gears. Our federal contaminated sites plan is something that is important to the mandate of Environment Canada. I know there were some announcements, and there are also related lines in the estimates on the plan to address the contaminated site at Randle Reef. Perhaps you could speak a little bit to the progress of that project and how it's represented in the estimates.

Hon. Peter Kent: Under the Canada-U.S. Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, Canada and the U.S. committed to address toxic hot spots in the Great Lakes. On our side, we have remediated, or begun remediating, four major sites. Randle Reef represents the largest remaining toxic site on the Canadian side of the Great Lakes. It is a toxic soup of contaminants produced over the decades as a byproduct of the steel industry. It is on the bottom of Hamilton Harbour. It covers hundreds of acres. The plan involves the Province of Ontario, the Government of Canada, the City of Hamilton, Hamilton Harbour, the local region, and the Municipality of Burlington. It will create a containment structure with steel provided by U.S. Steel, which is now the owner of the industrial property that will contain the main portion of the toxic site. The surrounding ooze, if you will, will be backfilled, and it will be permanently capped. This is a 10-year project costing almost \$150 million. We hope that with the completion of this project we will see a restoration of water quality in Hamilton Harbour on par with what we have seen in some of the surrounding natural areas.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Briefly, in my time remaining, to my colleague's questions about the Species at Risk Act, I would like to have you confirm that in budget 2012 there was a substantive increase to funding for the management of that program.

Perhaps you could briefly speak to that as well.

Hon. Peter Kent: Sure. Well, it is a very important program. As I said earlier, it is a young program. We do have a backlog of recovery plans. We try to prioritize and address those that are the most challenging, where the risk threat is at the highest and where recovery plans need to be put in place.

Again, I think this is a significant accomplishment that Environment Canada and the Canadian Wildlife Service can be very proud of in terms of... After years of study and consideration, we introduced the national recovery plan for the boreal caribou a year ago. It has been welcomed across the range. There are some criticisms in some areas, but by and large the scientists, the independent scientists, have said that it is a good start.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

• (0920)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel.

Thank you, Minister Kent. If we want to pursue that later, possibly we can.

We'll move to Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the minister and to the officials for coming. We're grateful for your time.

I'd like to begin with this. Of the \$3.9 million in budget 2012, we already know the program activity, but could you tell me the sub-activity that was cut?

Hon. Peter Kent: The \$3.9 million in which...?

Are you talking about the parks, or the...?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Let me go to my notes....

I'll come back to it.

Hon. Peter Kent: Okay.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: That's unless you have it.

Hon. Peter Kent: No. I mean, the planned spending decrease in Environment Canada is—

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: The \$3.9 million.

Hon. Peter Kent: Well, no: it's \$13.3 million, of which \$12.3 million is in operating and \$2.8 million is in grants and contributions. Then there were additional decreases with regard to capital and the employment benefit plan.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Okay, I have it: it's the \$3.9 million in Parks Canada.

Hon. Peter Kent: Oh, you're coming back to Parks Canada.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Yes.

Hon. Peter Kent: Sure. Well, the \$3.9 million....

Alan, I don't—

The Chair: If I've read your statement correctly, that was an increase in funding. At the top of page 3 in your opening comments, it says "\$3.9 million in funding for two items".

Hon. Peter Kent: Alan?

Mr. Alan Latourelle (Chief Executive Officer, Parks Canada): If it's the supplementary estimates (C)—

Hon. Peter Kent: Oh, I'm sorry, Ms. Duncan, it's the supplementary estimates (C) you're talking about.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Yes, sorry. I thought we were starting with the supplementary estimates.

Hon. Peter Kent: No, no, that's quite all right.

Alan.

Mr. Alan Latourelle: In terms of the supplementary estimates (C), there's an amount of \$2.1 million in new funding, for example, for Rouge Park, and \$1.8 million—

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: No. Of the \$3.9 million, what was—

Mr. Alan Latourelle: The \$3.9 million is mostly related to consultation and streamlining of our professional, technical, and policy capacity within Parks Canada, and also in terms of aligning our period of operation to the period of highest visitation.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: What was the sub-activity that was cut?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: It would be, for example, our visitor activities, our visitor services, and also our conservation and internal services.

It's across all of our program activities at Parks Canada.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Can you table with the committee very specifically what sub-activities were cut, please?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: Yes, we can.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you so much. And this is all on the supplementary estimates, please.

With as much detail as possible, can you tell me what the \$2.1 million appropriated for the Rouge National Urban Park is for?

Hon. Peter Kent: Sure. That's an easy one.

As you know, the budget last year detailed the total estimated investment that the creation of Rouge National Urban Park will require. This particular number is to cover the early expenses in preliminary work for the land transfer from the current bodies—the province, the Toronto conservation authority, the City of Toronto, the Town of Markham.

This is for the ongoing preparatory work to establish the park. Each year between now and the tenth year there will be similar allocations requested.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

I'd like to pick up on Ms. Leslie's comments. You talked about the Species at Risk Act and whether there need to be changes either through application or legislation.

I believe the feeling out there is it's generally a good act, but that it lacks implementation. Will the changes be through implementation or will they be through legislation?

Hon. Peter Kent: That's a valid question. That's a question that is being discussed in many quarters. But just to add to that, even some of the original drafters—

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Minister, could I have an answer?

Hon. Peter Kent: I'll come to your answer, but even—

• (0925)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Time is short.

Hon. Peter Kent: Some of the original drafters of the Species at Risk Act said that between the creation of the act and the way it passed through cabinet and was eventually proclaimed there were some changes made that limit its effectiveness—unintended consequences. So we are looking at the entire range of possibilities, again with stakeholders, some of whom were involved in the drafting of the original act and who concede that unintended outcomes did occur.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Do we have application or legislation?

Hon. Peter Kent: We're looking at both of those. We're considering all possible outcomes, a range of outcomes. There are some who feel that legislation is required for changed circumstances in some industrial sectors. There are others who say it could be made more effective simply with a change in practice.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: If you go the legislation route, do we have your commitment that it would be in a stand-alone bill and not in an omnibus bill?

Hon. Peter Kent: That would be my preference, but as you know, the government decides on the composition of bills and the timing of the legislative process.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

Vote 10 is reserved for grants and contributions, and in the main estimates 2012-13, \$2 million was allocated to ozone monitoring to fulfill our requirements under the Montreal protocol. Then \$1.5 million in vote 10 in the supplementary estimates (B) was reallocated.

Can you tell me where that \$1.5 million went, and from what program did it come?

Hon. Peter Kent: There are two answers. One is that it goes to the continuing operation of the ozone program, and two, as you know, the secretariat is located in Montreal, and that was for the continuing operation of the secretariat.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: In the main estimates 2012-13 and 2014 the ozone funding appears as a grant, yet in the supplementaries the wording implies that it was a contribution, that total authorities of \$400,000 are available within the vote due to a reallocation from contributions to fund a grant for the implementation of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

I'm wondering why there is inconsistency in the wording.

Hon. Peter Kent: I would turn to my deputy on that, but I think it's a matter of adapted accounting practices.

Mr. Bob Hamilton (Deputy Minister, Department of the Environment): I'll have to get back to you on the specific details of why that change was made within the grants and contributions.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: It's an important question, because contributions require a contribution agreement with other parties.

Could that be tabled with this committee, please?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Duncan, and Minister Kent.

We're going to move now to Madam Quach.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the minister and his officials for being with us this morning.

First, I have some questions about Parks Canada, more specifically regarding the \$51.2 million cuts you announced. An amount of \$19.7 million had already been announced in Budget 2012. These cuts have had some rather catastrophic repercussions on the number of visitors to parks.

There have been some direct impacts on services to the population for this winter alone, among them the maintenance of ski and snowshoe trails. They are not being maintained at all and are left to the care of volunteers who have agreements in principle with Parks Canada.

That is the case in several places, among them Point Pelee National Park, in Ontario, Prince Albert National Park in Saskatchewan, Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba, Elk Island National Park in Alberta, and the Forillon National Park in Quebec. Fewer trails are being maintained in these parks, and in some cases, there is no service at all anymore. The parks are open to the population but there are no longer any trails. Certain skating rinks have been closed in Manitoba. There was a staff reduction and the staff has been replaced by volunteers.

Service varies from one park to another. At the Riding Mountain National Park, friends of the park estimate that for this winter alone, there has been a 40% decline in the number of park users. And yet, public appreciation and understanding are a part of Parks Canada's core mandate.

Do you agree with that mandate?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you.

Certainly that is Parks Canada's mandate and commitment.

One has to realize that Parks Canada, like all government agencies and departments, is doing its part to address deficit reduction. Our government isn't reducing health care transfers to provinces, as other governments have done in the past. We're not reducing social transfers to the provinces. Basically, what we're doing is resizing government. For Parks Canada, one must realize that we're trying to focus resources. Parks Canada, which is one of the best agencies in the world and a model for many countries in national parks programs, is focusing its services on the peak periods of usage. Barely 5% of those who visit Canada's national parks and historic locations actually visit during the wintertime.

You're quite right, and we're very proud of the volunteer programs that have been established in various parks across the country. Some parts of the country are more prone to volunteering than others.

• (0930)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Allow me to stop you here, Mr. Minister. In fact, the volunteers are not paid. You say that you champion job creation, but a lot of jobs have been cut. There were cuts of \$19.7 million. The number of employees has been reduced, and there are repercussions on park attendance. I have here a table from Parks Canada that indicates that between 2007 and 2012, there was a 16% drop in the number of visitors to national historic sites. That is enormous.

In addition, you have replaced guides with signs. These were very well-paid employees who promoted the parks, and did awareness-raising and education with the population. You even put an end to all of the awareness-raising activities at the Montreal Biosphere, which was the only museum of that type in North America that offered educational activities to youngsters and to schools.

And yet, Environment Canada's mission is to ensure that the Canadian population has a sound, safe and sustainable environment. How can that mission be accomplished after cuts as deep as those you have just announced? How can you continue to say that one of the mandates of Parks Canada and Environment Canada is to improve people's appreciation? Those are really contradictory statements.

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent: I will respectfully disagree.

I respect the list that you provided of parks where volunteer agreements have been made. There are many more. The word I get back, certainly, from Parks Canada is that it is working; the trail-making, whether for skiing or snowshoeing, has worked. This was the original operation plan for Parks Canada. It's only in recent years

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: But it does not work. You have surely not gone to Forillon. People are not happy at all. There is no service.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Quach, your time is up.

If we want an answer from the minister, we have to give him a little bit of time to answer.

We're going to move now to Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you very much.

One of the items I saw in Environment Canada was an election commitment of this government. It was the creation of the hunting and angling advisory panel. It's something that the four to five million hunters and anglers in Canada very much appreciated. This is a group of people, individuals and groups, who don't just talk about environmentalism. They actually do something in terms of active conservation programming. The money they spend is raised by themselves. I was really pleased to see an acknowledgment by our government of this very important group of citizens who, in my view, have not got their due until now.

Could you express a vision for the hunting and angling advisory panel and how you see them interacting with your department and the government at large?

Hon. Peter Kent: Certainly, and thanks for the question.

Yes, the creation of the panel last fall fulfills a commitment by the Prime Minister to acknowledge and recognize a constituency that does have an important contribution to be made across a variety of environmental areas. The initial meeting of that panel, which is to be followed by our second meeting very shortly, will take a look at everything from species at risk to conservation practices, whether through conservation within Parks Canada or Ducks Unlimited.

Also we'll look at things such as working with the agricultural community in terms of wetland restoration, the entire spectrum. But it has been very good to see the enthusiasm with which these various organizations—fish and game organizations, provincial wildlife organizations, hunters, anglers, as well as the trapping industry—have joined in this and are offering some valuable advice, as I said, across a spectrum of environmental areas.

• (0935)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's much appreciated quite frankly, as far as I'm concerned. Getting advice from people who are actually on the land for the better part of the year is very important and, again, they are voices that are not too often heard.

Just to continue on the theme of partnerships and the collaborations with the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Where I live, south of Riding Mountain National Park, is a target area for the Nature Conservancy of Canada in terms of land conservation. Even though the amount of land we're looking at here, 338,000 hectares, doesn't seem like a lot compared to the national parks that have been created, to me—given that most of this land is in the working landscape—this is a very significant conservation gain for Canada. Can you talk about the ecological value of the lands that have been conserved under this program?

Hon. Peter Kent: Certainly.

Again, the Nature Conservancy of Canada is a wonderful partner in terms of protecting increasing thousands of hectares of nature, of land, while still allowing, as you say, the working landscape. In some parts of Canada and British Columbia, for example, some forestry operations are still allowed within a protected landscape, while at the same time other industrial operations, mining for example, will not be allowed. It also allows visitation more in the sense of a rugged adventure in pristine natural areas as opposed to visiting some of our traditional national parks, although it's still possible to have a great adventure in the Nahanni, the Nááts'ihch'oh, and Tornqat parks.

As I've remarked here, the allocation under the supplementaries (C) is the final spending under a five-year program that the government funded with the Nature Conservancy of Canada. But if I could just caution against any reaction of dismay at the end of this program, when programs are created for a set period of time with a fixed budget, it is intended that, at the end of that term, the program be evaluated to see if it achieved its outcomes. Worthy programs tend to be renewed, others may not. I would just suggest here that for an answer one must wait for the budget.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Kent.

Monsieur Choquette.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Minister. I also thank the officials for being here with us today.

I would like to continue on the topic of nature conservation. With regard to supplementary estimates (C), about \$24 million are going to be attributed to Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Can you tell me why the government is granting that amount of money for nature conservation that is outside of parliamentary control?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you. That is a good question, a valid question.

Federal taxpayers' dollars are very much front of mind when we embark on any funding programs. The Nature Conservancy of Canada has a sterling track record of multiplying federal dollars invested, with the private sector, with the charitable sector. For example, a very large territory of southern British Columbia was dedicated last year, which involved a 5:1 benefit on the federal dollars invested in the program. It allowed the protection of vast spaces of natural land that might otherwise be at risk of industrial development.

• (0940)

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: I agree with you, Mr. Minister. However, Nature Conservancy of Canada is not accountable to you. The Parliamentary Budget Officer does not check on how that organization manages its finances. And so we just do not know.

Given those circumstances, perhaps we could at least vote on that allocation of \$24 million, don't you think?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent: It is a program that our government is very proud of, and this final allocation of funds is to allow the Nature Conservancy to continue its work to, I believe, October of this year. Whether or not this program is renewed, we'll have to wait for the budget.

We're very proud of this program. We believe this is a significant investment, not only for our generation, but for generations to come, in terms of adding protective areas.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: According to what I understand, you are making the commitment to see to it that such amounts be voted on in future.

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent: This is the last phase of the program.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: As you mentioned that Nature Conservancy of Canada is a good partner, I suppose there will be another phase. Can you tell us about the next phase?

Hon. Peter Kent: We have to wait for the budget.

Mr. François Choquette: My next question concerns funds allocated to CIDA to fight climate change.

In this case also, I would like to know whether there is accountability. Are we in a position to ensure that that money is truly being used to fight climate change?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent: I think that all of our investments in climate change, both on the mitigation side, as well as in terms of adaptation, are indeed proving to be effective. As I say regularly during question period, whenever I have the occasion, climate change is a global challenge which requires a global solution. Canada is quite willing to do its part to address the 2% of annual GHGs, for example, that are generated, but we have to work internationally to convince—

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: I understand you well, Mr. Minister. Forgive me for interrupting you, but I would like to know to what extent Environment Canada is controlling the ultimate destination of this funding.

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent: The use of the money for the fast-start financing?

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Yes.

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent: As you know, our commitment was \$1.2 billion, over a three-year period. Canada, like many other countries, did not have the capacity to identify programs immediately, but we wanted to work. In the first year, a large amount of that money went to international financial institutions to disburse on the climate change file. In years two and three, and particularly this year, we have been able to identify specific projects, whether in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, or Asia, which we are now targeting and overseeing. Many of these programs will continue for the next two or three years. They're not single-year programs.

I could provide you with a list of those programs, if you wish.

The Chair: I think we'll have to wait for that provision because your time is up.

Mr. Kent, you've agreed to give us one hour. We're very close to that.

Are you willing to take one more question?

Hon. Peter Kent: Sure.

The Chair: Okay.

Next on our list is Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): I have three good questions here, Mr. Chair. Let's boil it down to one.

In your remarks, Minister, you did mention the \$24 million in funding for the Nature Conservancy—my colleague Bob mentioned that just a moment ago—to help them continue in their important work to help secure ecologically sensitive lands and protect our diverse ecosystems.

The question I have, really, is on the increased contributions in support of sustainable ecosystems in the new statutory appropriations listed here in relation to the Nature Conservancy. Is that related to the national conservation plan that was announced in the Speech from the Throne, and can you give us some idea at what stage the planning for the national conservation plan might be?

• (0945)

Hon. Peter Kent: Sure. Thank you. Certainly as we continue to work, and this committee has considered the national conservation plan, I would think that the Nature Conservancy of Canada would play a part in that eventual larger plan, as would any number of other potential partners and agencies, again with Environment Canada, with Parks Canada. As we come closer to actually striking the actual framework for the national conservation plan, certainly the Nature Conservancy of Canada will be one of the considered stakeholders.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you.

The Chair: You have three and a half minutes.

Mr. James Lunney: I thought you said only had two minutes.

The Chair: No, I said we'll go one more round.

Mr. James Lunney: Bonus.

Since 2006 we've seen a tremendous expansion in parklands available. I remember an announcement about the Nahanni National Park being expanded, and the Great Bear Rainforest on the west coast, which is kind of iconic out in our side of the world. There's, on the eastern side of the Great Slave Lake, Ramparts River, and there's the Gwaii Haanas National Park, which is huge, on the west coast. There's the Rouge National Urban Park, the first urban park here. And in your remarks you mentioned, collectively, 150,000 square kilometres added to the parks system. And again there's what was just mentioned with the Nature Conservancy, about 338,000 hectares of working landscape being recovered.

These project, we're pretty excited about. I think committee members are very interested in this. Recently our committee's been looking at urban parks, and we're hearing a lot about nature deficit disorder, about the disconnect between urban dwellers.... Increasingly about 80% of our population lives in cities. The experiences with nature are diminishing as kids are more into electronic gadgets

and so on. One of the projects that we heard about is Parks Canada experimented with providing passes for kids in grade 8, I think.

But I'm wondering, if we're looking ahead to the national conservation plan, are we looking at strategies of how we can encourage young people in particular, who particularly may be coming from our immigrant communities, to have positive experiences with nature? Because we certainly understand that there are tremendous benefits to all of us, as Canadians, personally and in terms health benefits, when we appreciate nature by interacting with it positively.

Hon. Peter Kent: Absolutely. That is a large part of the thinking behind the creation of the Rouge National Urban Park on the very outskirts of the Greater Toronto Area. It's also a big part of Parks Canada's very successful program, learn to camp, where across the country for the last couple of years, young people and their families, many new Canadians—who associate tents most often with refugee circumstances—are encouraged to leave the urban centres, where very often they first arrive in Canada, and to experience the great Canadian outdoors.

We're hoping that the Rouge Park—and even now it's available for camping—when it is completed as Canada's first urban national park will be accessible to fully 20% of the Canadian population, young people. It's the only national park where public transit will allow students to come to interpretation centres, to interact with nature, and we hope it will be used as a springboard to visit some of our more remote parks, traditional parks like Banff and Jasper but also the Nahanni, the Nàáts'ihch'oh, Gros Morne, and Torngat. We have legislation, as you know before the Senate now, to create a national park on Sable Island off Nova Scotia.

The Chair: You still have a couple seconds, but just in the interest of Minister Kent's time I want to cut it off there.

Thank you again, Minister Kent, for appearing. We're going to have a two-minute recess to allow Mr. Kent to leave and then we have the hour to continue with the officials.

• (0950)

The Chair: We will ask our witnesses to take their places, and also our committee members, please, so we can proceed.

We want to welcome our new guests at the witness table, Carol Najm and Mr. Hanson. Welcome to the committee today.

We are going to proceed with our committee question list. Mr. Pilon is next on our list.

Mr. Pilon, you have five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Good morning. I thank our witnesses for being here with us.

In his presentation, Mr. Kent referred to “\$4.2 million to renew the Lake Winnipeg Bassin Initiative” and “\$4.1 million to go towards the implementation of the Great Lakes Nutrient Initiative.” However, we know that the budget for the Experimental Lakes Area was abolished. Can someone explain the rationale behind that government decision?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Pilon, did you direct that to a specific person?

Go ahead, Mr. Hamilton.

[Translation]

Mr. Bob Hamilton: I am going to answer the question you just asked.

[English]

Before I do that, just to finish on the last session we had, there was an outstanding question. Can I take that one very quickly?

The Chair: I will let Mr. Pilon agree. It's his time.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: I agree, if the answer is very brief.

[English]

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Okay, but I will come back to give some more information on that.

On the issue of Lake Winnipeg, I can't really respond to the government's decision about experimental lakes versus this. What I can respond to is where we provide money for areas like Lake Winnipeg and like the Great Lakes.

I think, as the minister indicated, it's to try to address environmental issues that have arisen in the ecosystems around those lakes. We've had the renewal of the Lake Winnipeg funding and, as the minister said, we have signed an agreement with the United States on the Great Lakes to improve the water quality, address nutrient issues, and various other issues.

In terms of trade-offs that governments make about what programs get funded and what programs get cut, I won't respond to that. Just suffice it to say that on those areas and the areas related to the main estimates, we are contributing significant funding to try to address the important.... There are issues of water quality that we find in those lakes.

• (0955)

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: My second question is probably for Mr. Hamilton.

Mr. Kent said that 10% of the territory was already protected. We know that the objective is to protect 17% of the territory. What are your projects to meet that objective?

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Hamilton.

[Translation]

Mr. Bob Hamilton: I apologize, but I'm having some trouble with the earphone.

Could you repeat your question?

Mr. François Pilon: Minister Kent said that at this time, 10% of the territory is protected. We know that the objective is 17%. How do you intend to meet that objective? Have any programs been put in place or is there nothing yet?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: Parks Canada plays an important role in connection with the new protected areas. We are currently working in several national parks. The Manitoba Lowlands National Park and the Bathurst Island National Park are two examples. We are currently working in approximately seven national parks, and there could be dividends in the years to come.

Mr. François Pilon: I agree entirely with my colleague Ms. Quach, who said earlier that Parks Canada had found savings of \$19.7 million. Could you please specify how these savings were achieved? I would like you to explain where the cuts were made, how the decisions were made, and to outline the reasoning behind the choices.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Latourelle.

[Translation]

Mr. Alan Latourelle: First, it is important to note that we are going to invest close to \$600 million again this year for Canadians. So that is an important investment for Parks Canada.

Secondly, with regard to the \$600 million, we are placing the emphasis mostly on those periods where there are the most visitors. So we have made some important changes to our operations, but are investing in the period when people come to visit the parks in order to ensure that our services will remain quality services. We have also reviewed all of the internal Parks Canada structure, and we consolidated several of our professional, technical and operational policy development services.

Those are the two broad strategies we used to respect our budget.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Pilon, your time is up, but you used a minute of your time for the repeat so I'll give you another minute.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: Thank you.

Could you please specify the contributions to be made in support of sustainable ecosystems? The committee has been doing studies for over a year. I would like to know if contributions have been made in support of sustainable ecosystems.

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Regarding specific programs, I will have to send you information on that because I don't have it to hand. I will send you a letter with reference to specific projects.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pilon.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the departmental officials for being here.

I would like to say that although the minister is not here, it is, I think, important to recognize the leadership he has had on this file. It was good to see him at the PDAC conference in Toronto this weekend, talking with the mining sector as well. It's great to see the minister being as busy as he actually is on the environment file and consulting with industry.

I would like to get into a couple of things that we've heard about today, specifically in regard to national parks. I have to admit, I'm confused. I was under the impression that our government had actually increased the actual footprint of the national parks in this country. Is that true? Could you expand on that a little bit—on if so, how much?

• (1000)

Mr. Alan Latourelle: Yes, over the last five or six years there's been a significant expansion of our national parks system, for example, the Nahanni expansion, the Nááts'ihch'oh expansion. Those two brought Nahanni National Park watershed protection from 5,000 square kilometres to close to 35,000 square kilometres, as an example.

Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area is the largest freshwater conservation area in the world. Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and Haida Heritage Site is the only place globally protected from the seabed to the mountaintop.

We have, through Parks Canada, either implemented or are in the process of completing close to a 50% expansion of our parks system and marine conservation area system.

Mr. Brian Storseth: That's a 50% increase. Wow.

Earlier today Rouge Park was talked about as an urban conservation area. The plan for part of this is to be able to make it more accessible for young kids so they can actually participate in this conservation strategy that we've put together, so that they'll be more active, perhaps, in going to other parks. Is that indeed the case?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: That is the case. I think we see the Rouge National Urban Park as a critical part of our strategy to engage young Canadians, new Canadians, and urban Canadians. For example, there are several universities also located very near, so we will be working and have already developed some partnerships with them to get students involved as we establish the park in terms of our operations, our science, all of our programs related to the Rouge National Urban Park.

Mr. Brian Storseth: It's my experience, from some of the national parks that I deal with in Alberta, where I'm from, that while the visitor numbers overall did see a decrease for a time, the new strategy is actually working and the numbers are rebounding. That's the case study I see in Alberta. Is that true at a more national level?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: From a total Parks Canada perspective, we embarked on a strategy about five years ago to change and put in place strategies to stop that decline. This summer was a great summer, with a 4% increase in visitation overall for Parks Canada. Also, I would like to note that our national historic sites have seen a 7% increase, which I'm quite proud of because we had seen close to a 15% reduction in visitation at those over the last decade. So we're turning the tide.

Mr. Brian Storseth: That's excellent.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I have a quick question on Lake Simcoe. This is something that I know the member of Parliament for Barrie is very interested in. It's something that he's talked a lot about to others.

Could you talk a bit about the Lake Simcoe funding, about how much it is and the strategy behind it?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Perhaps I'll ask Lawrence Hanson, who's with us at the table, to provide the details on the Lake Simcoe funding, which is again, as you say, a very important project for us.

The Chair: Mr. Hanson.

Mr. Lawrence Hanson (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of the Environment): The funding for the program that was initially announced in 2007 in the budget was renewed subsequently in the 2012 budget for a level of \$29 million over each of the five-year periods. By and large, there are a lot of these ecosystem initiatives.

Earlier you mentioned some of the sustainable ecosystem initiatives. Whether it be Lake Winnipeg, the Great Lakes nutrient initiative, or, for that matter, Lake Simcoe, much of it has to do with a point the minister made earlier during his remarks about nutrient loading into various water bodies, particularly but not exclusively from phosphorous from such activities as agriculture and just larger urban growth.

What the Lake Simcoe initiative has been designed to do is to create stewardship projects that can be funded to assist in remediation of water quality in Lake Simcoe, similar, in some ways at least, to some of the stewardship activities that are happening Lake Winnipeg and in the Great Lakes as well.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for attending here today. There are a few things I'd like to touch on.

The first is regarding the questioning earlier about the Nature Conservancy. I'll preface my remarks by saying that over the last number of years we have had numerous witnesses appear before this committee, and whenever any of them were asked about the Nature Conservancy program that our government operates, they praised it, and it unreservedly was considered to be a great success. Until the NDP member spoke earlier, I have never heard anyone challenge the merit of that program.

I would like to ask you this, Mr. Hamilton. I understand that it was a multi-year program of several hundred million dollars at least. Could you remind us of over what number of years and what the total government expenditure was on the program with the Nature Conservancy?

• (1005)

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Yes. I can say that it's a five-year program, and what we're looking at this year in the estimates is the last phase of that. We talked earlier about the \$25 million. That's the last phase of that program.

I think I would echo your comments. Any commentary I've received on the program has been very positive in terms of what it has been able to do and how it has been able to leverage that money more broadly to achieve its goals.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Do you happen to have at your fingertips the total amount of the government expenditure on that program over the five years?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: I believe that it's \$210 million over the five-year period.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Very good.

This item that appears on the supplementary estimates, the \$24 million, is the last installment of that, so I assume that at this point it falls off the books and would not be repeated in the 2013-14 estimates. Is that correct?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: That's right, pending any future decisions that might be made. Yes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Very good.

I'd also like to ask you about the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, because we have people who go across this country and accuse the government of not doing enough on environmental assessments, getting it wrong on environmental assessments, and not consulting with aboriginal groups on environmental assessments. I regard that criticism to be ill-informed at best and mischievously misleading at worst.

I was interested to hear the minister mention that the Canadian environmental assessment funding is estimated to almost double, from \$17 million to \$31 million in 2013-14. I wonder, Mr. Hamilton, if you could just elaborate on what that is directed toward and how that will improve the environmental assessment process in Canada.

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Sure. Well, certainly since we have the president of the agency here—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Oh, I'm sorry. My apologies.

Mr. Bob Hamilton: —Elaine, I'll allow her to answer that question.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: That would be fine. Thank you.

Ms. Elaine Feldman (President, Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency): Thank you very much.

Our funding does show an increase of \$14 million for next year, and that's because a lot of the funding we have is sunset funding that was renewed in budget 2012. Of that funding, \$6.6 million is devoted to aboriginal consultation. That includes funding for aboriginal groups to participate in environmental assessment, because the government uses a whole-of-government approach in dealing with aboriginal groups and impacts that projects may have on their potential or established aboriginal rights and titles. The agency provides funding to aboriginal groups to participate in consultations during the course of the environmental assessment. Part of that funding is for aboriginal groups. The other part of that \$6.6 million is for the agency to conduct those consultations.

In addition, we received funding to enable the agency to carry out environmental assessment of major resource projects. Prior to the enactment of the new CEAA legislation, all government departments

were responsible for carrying out environmental assessment. That responsibility now falls to only three authorities: the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, the National Energy Board, and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

So CEAA is responsible for the environmental assessment of the major projects across Canada.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Very good, and I hope Canadians will be assured by the fact that we are increasing and renewing funding to CEAA to look after that responsibility.

Mr. Chair, do I have some time left?

The Chair: You have about eight seconds.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: In that case, I don't think I'll be able to ask about the fast-start program, but thank you.

The Chair: Do you rest your case?

Thank you, Ms. Feldman.

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Could I use that eight seconds for one quick thing?

When you asked how much money has been spent on the national conservancy, I believe I said \$210 million. Just to correct, \$225 million will have been spent over the course of the five-year period.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you for that clarification.

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Can you tell me which strategic outcome or grant and contribution the oil sands monitoring program would fall under?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: We're working jointly with Alberta on the monitoring program. The agreement is that the industry would pay for that monitoring, so it comes in under vote net revenues for us. For example, if it turns out that between ourselves and the Alberta government we spend \$20 million to enhance monitoring, the industry would pay that for us.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: But right now the industry has agreed to pay a maximum of \$15 million a year for the monitoring. It's my understanding that so far there is no governance structure in place to collect the money. Is that correct?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: That's part of what we're working on with Alberta. Basically, in the state we're at now, there's been a lot of work done since the announcement about a year ago. We've been working with the Alberta government on exactly how we're going to carry out and implement that announcement. I'd say we're very far along the road. I think we've resolved virtually all of the key issues. One of the issues is the governance structure, and we hope to be agreeing soon on an MOU with Alberta on that governance structure. Part of the agreement is that the industry will pay for the cost.

I believe you might have said \$15 million?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: No, \$50 million.

Will there be a plan to recoup the cost that industry has promised to pay?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Yes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

Can you explain the cut of \$7.5 million for emergency response, please?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Certainly, I can explain that in part.

On the emergency response, we've consolidated our operations into one place in Montreal. We really think we've done a very good job, as I look at it from where I sit, of trying to streamline our operation, make it more effective. But it has involved consolidating it in one place. We are certainly prepared to go where we need to go if required, but by taking this activity that had been dispersed across the country and putting it into a central location, we think we can actually do a better job in responding to environmental emergencies, and along the way, we've managed to save the money that you've referred to.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: You know there's great concern about moving this to the central part of the country should there be an oil spill on any of our coastlines. We've seen this with helicopters. We're seeing this with communications, for example, on the Great Lakes. There's real concern there.

Of the \$51.2 million in cuts to Parks Canada, how much of that is cuts to scientists?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: They are not cuts of \$51 million; I think the reductions we have implemented are \$19.7 million. The other elements are basically funding that we had for specific projects in the past that have come to the end of their program; for example, the Trans-Canada—

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I understand that, but what cuts are to scientists, please?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: In terms of our science program—for example, in the conservation program, to use a practical example—in 2006 we had 442 people involved in research conservation. We still have 656 people now, so we've seen an increase over the last few years.

What we have done in Parks Canada is consolidate and streamline our science policy and professional and technical services.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Could I ask you to table with the committee the areas in which there have been cuts to monitoring? Looking since 2006, in the last budget, and going forward, where are the cuts, if any, to scientists, to monitoring, and by program area, please?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: Let me respond to this. It is important to understand the difference between changes to our investment in personnel versus what we can achieve with what we have, because we still have a very strong monitoring program across all of our national parks.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Okay, but you will table information on where the cuts have occurred, by area and by how many people we've lost, will you?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: Yes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I know. I am watching carefully. Thank you.

On climate change and clean air, it looks as though there was a cut of \$13.9 million or 7.2%. How does this square with the announcements we've seen about the green agenda that's being presented to the United States? How do you square those cuts of 7.2%? There has really been a flurry of announcements since Obama's state of the union address and the comments of the ambassador of the United States.

• (1015)

The Chair: I'll give you time to respond to that.

Mr. Bob Hamilton: It is fair to say on climate change and clean air that we're moving aggressively on that front. The minister outlined what we're doing in transportation. We have moved forward with the coal-fired electricity; now we're doing oil and gas regulations. So we are devoting considerable resources to this.

You're quite right that the recent announcements, the President's inaugural speech, and the increased intensity of climate change discussion in the U.S. are important to us. What we have done is outline our target with the U.S. for how we want to reduce greenhouse gases by 2020, 17% lower than 2005 levels. We've aligned our policies wherever we can. Transportation would be a great example of this.

What the U.S. does or thinks about climate change is obviously something important, which we have to consider within our policy structure and framework.

The precise cut that you're referring to is, I believe, some sunset funding that was available, which dropped off. We get funding over a certain time period for particular projects. I'll check and I'll get you any additional information on that. What we see in this area is that we get money for a period of time—sometimes those overlap—and the funding drops off. I believe that's what has happened here, but I'll get back.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hamilton.

I will remind the committee that at the end of this meeting we need to take about 10 minutes to vote on these votes, so I'm going to try to preserve 10 minutes for that purpose.

We'll move on to Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Thanks.

I'll start by addressing some questions to Mr. Hamilton.

In the earlier part of my career I spent a couple of years in management consulting, and one of the things we were often tasked to do when looking at both public sector and private sector organizations was to ask questions such as what the mandate of the organization was, how you deliver the services put in the mandate, and then how you resource those things effectively.

We've had a lot of questions here about cuts and whatnot, and we can argue the methodology of presentation of the estimates, etc., but do you think it's reasonable for us to ask as parliamentarians how we can deliver the mandate of an organization most effectively, especially when we're looking at the allocation of resources that are provided by Canadian taxpayers?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Yes, I think it's a very reasonable question, and in fact it's one we address every day. In any environment you have to ask yourself about your priorities and whether you're doing the best you can as an organization to deliver on the mandate you've been provided with the resources you have. Obviously, as the resources get smaller you have to do an even better job of trying to find ways to make sure you're delivering on your core mandate in the most efficient way possible.

Frankly, Environment Canada has gone through that process over the last couple of years. There was budget 2012, certainly, but there were other forces that caused us to have a look at the resources we had available, what we were doing, and how we could best focus on the activities that were most productive in ensuring our mandate of a clean, safe, sustainable environment for Canadians.

We talked earlier about some of the administrative efficiencies we've seen. I would argue that the consolidation of the emergency centre is a good example of these. We've seen others. The minister referenced early some things we're looking at on the enforcement and other sides whereby we can, through combining either with Parks Canada or with other partners, find ways to do frankly a better job than we were doing, and in some cases with fewer resources.

Resource reduction forces you in some cases to make some hard choices, but that's what running this department is about, and these are the kinds of choices we have to make with the support of the government, when policy issues are at play.

It's an important question.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: There was some discussion today about the capacity for scientific research within the department. Would you agree that research that falls within the scope of Environment Canada is also conducted across other departments; that there are scopes of research that perhaps we partner with? We also partner with academic institutions, etc.

Would you characterize the scientific capacity that Environment Canada has as sufficient and as something that has actually increased under our government, when you look at the whole of funding to such agencies as the three research councils, other departments, etc.?

• (1020)

Mr. Bob Hamilton: I've been in this job about six months, and I have to say I'm quite impressed with the science capacity of our department—and it's not just me looking at it, but it's the impression when you talk to others.

We talked about oil sands monitoring. I think the recognition of what Environment Canada scientists bring to that table is impressive. We've talked in the past about the number of publications our scientists have.

They are definitely a core group that we are proud of, and they feed into pretty much every aspect of what we do at Environment

Canada. When we're designing a regulation, the science is very important for us, to try to make sure we get it right. When we're looking at what to do about cleaning up lakes, which we talked about earlier, that science is very important.

But we know we can't do it ourselves, and I think the core of your point is that we need to make sure we're working effectively with other science departments around government, whether NRCan, Fisheries and Oceans, or what have you, but also with academic institutions.

I've been across the country and have seen how some of our science labs are operating and where we've done some effective joint partnerships with universities, and it has been very impressive. The science capacity we have levers the amount of work we can do to look at some fairly sophisticated things. I think the science is not only about creating an attraction for great scientists within Environment Canada, but also making sure that we can work effectively with other organizations.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Perhaps I'll close my time with Mr. Latourelle.

It's been my privilege to be in this portfolio and to see, across the different scopes of work that Environment Canada undertakes, significant movement of the yardsticks on such files as our greenhouse gas emission files, species at risk, etc.

I want to focus a bit on your department. It's my understanding that, as Mr. Storseth has pointed out, we've increased the footprint of protected land in this country by 50%. We've actually seen a rebound in visits to the parks, as you mentioned earlier. I think, if we look at the numbers, you actually see an increase year over year, since we formed the government, in Parks Canada funding.

Perhaps you could first of all verify that this is the case, in light of some of the commentary here today, and speak of where you see Parks Canada going in the future under this government.

The Chair: We're almost out of time. You can respond quickly to that, and hopefully we'll stay within our timeframe.

Mr. Alan Latourelle: I've been the CEO of Parks Canada for 10 years now. When I joined Parks Canada as the CEO, the budget was \$395 million. Today the estimates before you are \$600 million. So there has been quite a significant change.

In terms of the future, I think we really have three priorities. They are to continue expanding the system, to achieve real conservation outcomes—we are implementing the largest conservation restoration program in our history as an organization—and to invest time and resources to connect Canadians to these great places. Those are the three key priorities we have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Latourelle. Thank you, Ms. Rempel.

We'll move to Ms. Leslie.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My first question is about the Experimental Lakes Area and the closure of ELA. There have been rumours. We've all read them. I have no inside knowledge, but there's been some discussion that maybe another organization would be willing to take over the ELA. I'm wondering, Mr. Hamilton, if you're able to tell us if there has been any discussion of the possibility of the federal government's keeping the liability for the site, so that if the site is transferred to an organization the government would carry that liability burden.

Mr. Bob Hamilton: I'm afraid I can't help you with that one. The experimental lakes is an issue that our colleagues at the Department of Fisheries are managing. I don't know whether any of my colleagues at the table feel that they have anything constructive to say. I can undertake to get you some information, but as to the question you're asking, I don't know the status of those discussions.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Even that information is helpful. Those discussions are taking place primarily at DFO.

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Yes.

• (1025)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thanks.

I brought up the fact that there are 510 species listed on SARA and 257 don't have a recovery document posted on the public registry. Recovery documents for 210 of those are overdue. I'm wondering about the government's plans to address the backlog.

Mr. Bob Hamilton: It may be small comfort, but I can report some updating on those numbers, which are largely in the same range. We have 264 strategies proposed. We need 246. That's a little bit better than the numbers you quoted. We understand that we have a backlog with SARA, and we're doing the best we can within our resources to address it on a priority basis. The minister mentioned the caribou recovery strategy. We're quite glad to have got that out, but there are many others that we need to do.

What we're doing is a two-track approach. One is trying to eliminate the backlog as quickly as we can. We've made some good progress during the last number of years in the number of recovery strategies that we have. If you compared this with the five previous years, we're doing better, but we need to do better still.

The second thing that we're looking at is things we could do in the way of implementation or legislative or regulatory change. As the minister said, there's a full range of options that we as officials are looking at to work within the existing legislative framework and do it better. There are people out there who say that the law is pretty much fine; we just need to find a better way to do it.

Ms. Megan Leslie: I'm not quite understanding. Are you saying that legislative or regulatory change would address the fact that we need to develop recovery strategies for these species?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: It would help. I'll come back to what it would do for the existing backlog. But going forward, whether it's through implementation or legislative change, we'd like to find a way to better line up what we want to accomplish. We want to identify a priority species and have timelines and responsibilities we can deliver on. I don't know what that would be at this moment. We're still thinking about some possible options. We wouldn't want to contribute to the backlog as we have been in the past. In that context, one would have to think about what we can best do with the backlog. Maybe it's more implementation. Maybe we could do a better job of

prioritizing and making sure that we're taking off the highest priority species. Maybe there's something we could do with other parts of the backlog that doesn't require a full recovery strategy but that might be more efficient. There are the two tracks for dealing with the backlog, but there's also trying to think ahead and see if there's a way to prevent a bigger backlog.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and thank you, Ms. Leslie.

We are going to move to Mr. Sopuck and then Ms. Duncan, if she has another question, and then we need to move on to dealing with the actual votes to approve the supplementary estimates and the main estimates.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: The last tranche of fast-start financing is due to be released in 2013-14. On what activities has this funding gone toward, and what are some of the results we have seen?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: As the minister mentioned, fast-start financing is part of our agreement. Internationally we've agreed to provide \$1.2 billion in funding. It tries to look at a mixture of activities whereby we can help developing countries deal with their efforts to try either to mitigate climate change or to adapt to climate change. Parks Canada has been part of that. We talked earlier about CIDA and some of the projects it has participated in to try to help some of the poorest countries adapt to climate change.

I won't go through all the projects in gory detail, but I would certainly be happy to provide them because there are quite a few. Suffice it to say, that's been an important part of the international climate change discussions, to find ways for Canada and others to provide that funding. We are finishing the last tranche of that and then there's a bigger question at play internationally about how we might go further as a group of countries going toward 2020.

That funding ends March 31 of this year. As I say, we are in the last phase of that.

• (1030)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thanks.

Ms. Feldman, my next question is in regard to the relationship between environmental assessment and environmental outcomes: what happens in a project. The stuff I have read and been involved with in my professional career...the projects initiated by industry build in the best environmental practices from day one in terms of, let's say, water quality, remediation, air quality, and biodiversity protection.

When an environmental assessment from a project proponent comes to your office, by and large the best environmental practices of the day are already built in. Is that a fair assessment?

Ms. Elaine Feldman: I think it's fair to say that each project is different. When we provide the environmental impact statement guidelines to proponents, we work with them over the course of the time it will take for them to come back with their environmental impact statement so that issues that come up along the way can be resolved. Best practices, as you say, can be put forward by proponents. It's very much a give and take throughout the process.

In terms of the environmental outcome, the new act now provides for the minister to issue a decision statement with conditions, which will enable the agency to monitor whether proponents have lived up to the conditions of the decision statement and whether they're having the outcomes that they were predicted to have. I think this is a truly important component of the new legislation and one that was not there in the previous year.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: To me the focus has to be on what's happening out there in the environment itself. All these arguments about consultation processes are often divorced from the environmental outcomes.

In terms of environmental outcomes, I'd like to talk about environmental indicators in Canada. Over the last decade or so most of Canada's environmental indicators have improved. I'm thinking of NO_x, SO₂, and so on. There's been a steady improvement in Canada's environment overall.

Is that a fair assessment?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Yes, I believe that is a fair assessment, in terms of some of the improvements that have been made.

We publish our environmental indicators so it's there for all to see. Having said that, I think we have the prospect of even more improvements. On NO_x and SO_x air quality, in October we reached agreement with the provinces on an air quality management system for Canada, which I think was a major accomplishment in trying to bring all the players together to get an agreement on how we can improve air quality in Canada.

We are now working together to try to implement that. I'm fully expecting that's going to generate even further increases. It's an example of the work we do at Environment Canada day-to-day.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I couldn't agree with you more that there's always room for improvement.

Interestingly, wealthy western industrial societies generate continuous environmental improvement. As far as I'm concerned, the sky is the limit. However, we still need to work on some environmental indicators. A number of us are very concerned about the issue of wetland loss. That should be a priority, as far as I'm concerned.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will move to Ms. Duncan and just ask you to keep your questions to four minutes. We gave you a little more last time, so please keep your comments to four minutes this time.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to use real jargon here. Inside your program alignment architecture, where does oil sands monitoring fit?

Ms. Carol Najm (Assistant Deputy Minister, Finance Branch, Department of the Environment): Oil sands monitoring is received through vote net revenues that are not present in the main estimates numbers before you. So those are incremental costs that will be covered by industry through our authorities for vote net revenues.

Right now the main estimates do not include the costs for oil sands.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Can you table, or give us now, what the actual expenditure has been in the past and what the projected expenditures will be going into the future?

Ms. Carol Najm: The nature of these expenses is incremental based on the agreement we'll sign with the province and what we will bill industry. They're incremental activities that the department is engaging on for oil sands monitoring; they're not present in the numbers at all.

• (1035)

Mr. Bob Hamilton: To add to that, I think what Carol is referring to is that we were doing monitoring already, and so what this agreement does is step it up, and so it's incremental to that.

Let us go back and try to find the figures for you in terms of what we're spending now. In terms of the future, it may be more difficult to provide a precise estimate, at least until the MOU is finally signed, but let me look at what we can do. We can certainly tell you what the incremental is that we've seen thus far over the past year.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you. That's what I would like to know: what we have spent and what are we going to spend going forward.

The last thing I'd like to ask is this. Can you give us a detailed breakdown on where the cuts are happening in the \$31.5 million relating to savings measures for Environment Canada?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Whenever you start with detailed breakdown....

I don't know, Carol, if you want to start and then I'll come in.

Ms. Carol Najm: Yes. The \$31 million consists of initiatives that will find administrative efficiencies throughout the organization.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: What are they, please?

Ms. Carol Najm: Some of these examples include the reduction in travel expenditures, reduction in the use of professional services, consolidation of our locations, saving \$5 million—

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Could you be more specific? I'm hearing some of these cuts. I'd like to know program cuts.

Ms. Carol Najm: The proposals are over three years and 2012-13 is the first year of implementation, so what have been implemented to date are mostly on the administrative efficiencies side, and the programs have three years to completely implement those changes. So year one is a lot of the administrative efficiencies to date.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: What is it in year two and three?

Ms. Carol Najm: In year two and three, we look for reducing redundancies in our reporting, focusing on our core mandate and where services can be provided by other parties—stakeholders and more appropriate levels of government. Those types of programs will be reduced.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Can you specify what the programs are? I'm hearing redundancies in reporting. I'd really like the specifics here, please.

Mr. Bob Hamilton: We can provide you with that. Just to take one step between the full detail, which we will do in writing, as Carol said, this is a three-year program so we see a \$13-million reduction this year; that's going to grow to \$31 million and ultimately I believe \$58 million over the three-year period. That's about a 5% cut for Environment Canada. About 70% of those savings are going to come from streamlining administrative efficiencies, and the balance will come from our getting out of programs, activities that were not core.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Could we know what that 30% is?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Yes, we will provide the information.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have just a few business items to take care of, as a committee. You've all received a second draft of the report on urban conservation. I just want to remind you that these are confidential documents. If you don't want either the English or the French, you can return that to the clerk. We will be dealing with that at our next meeting on Thursday.

We now need to move through the votes on the supplementary estimates (C) and the main estimates. You have these documents in front of you, supplied by our analysts and clerk, and so we're going to move through those beginning with—

Yes, Madam Leslie?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thanks. Before we begin, owing to the fact that we haven't had the report on plans and priorities tabled and the minister has indicated a willingness to come back and speak to the main estimates once that report is tabled, I ask that we defer the votes on the main estimates until a later date. We have until June to adopt the main estimates. I don't think there would be a problem with that.

The Chair: Is there any response from committee members on that?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: No. We're in agreement.

The Chair: Let's move then to the first section, the supplementary estimates (C) 2012-13.

Shall vote 1c, under Environment, carry?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Actually, Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I would like to ask perhaps a bit of an unorthodox question to our chief financial officer.

Are there any implications to the business of supply in deferring the main estimates?

Ms. Carol Najm: Ordinarily, we look for the main estimates to be approved as soon as possible to allow us to then work through our own budgets and planning for the coming year. We will go on the basis that these numbers are approved, but to wait until June may be a little difficult for us to manage the year.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, given that information, I request that we vote on the main estimates today.

The Chair: Unless we hear further, we're going to take that as a request. We can vote on the suggestion, if you want to make that a motion.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Yes.

The Chair: Is there agreement to proceed with both the supplementary estimates (C) and the main estimates?

• (1040)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Chair, it certainly wouldn't be anybody's intention to wait until June.

Certainly we'd like to get your numbers as soon as possible. But we are going to have the minister back at committee to speak to the main estimates, from our perspective, as soon as the report on plans and priorities is tabled—

The Chair: The question is that we don't know when that is, so I think that means an open-ended—

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I move that we move in camera so we can discuss future business.

The Chair: I think we need to deal with the estimates, though.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: I move that we move in camera.

The Chair: Okay.

There's a motion on the floor to move in camera. The motion is not debatable.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Could we have a recorded vote, please?

[English]

The Chair: You want a recorded vote?

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: We'll have a recorded vote on moving in camera.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: Okay, that motion is carried. We're moving in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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