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Chair

Mr. Harold Albrecht

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC)): I'd like to call to order meeting 31 of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

We are pleased to have with us today Julie Gelfand, the Commissioner of the Environment, along with many of her officials, who will be introduced more fully later on.

We're going to proceed with a 10-minute opening statement by Ms. Gelfand, followed by questions from our members.

Ms. Gelfand, welcome. We're glad to have you with us.

Ms. Julie Gelfand (Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm pleased to present today my fall 2014 report, which was tabled in the House of Commons yesterday.

I'm accompanied by Kimberley Leach, Bruce Sloan, Andrew Ferguson, and Jim McKenzie, who are the principals responsible for the audits in our report.

The audits I'm reporting on today underscore that the government does not have the answers to many questions that impact the future of sustainable development in Canada. When we last looked at climate change commitments in 2012, we concluded that the government's approach to introducing regulations sector by sector was unlikely to reduce emissions enough to meet the Copenhagen target.

[Translation]

Under the Copenhagen Accord, Canada committed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 17% below 2005 levels by 2020. Our most recent audit showed that little has changed over the last two years. We found that federal measures currently in place will have little effect on emissions by 2020.

The government has introduced regulations in the transportation and electricity generation sectors. However, regulations in the oil and gas sector—where emissions are growing the fastest—are still not in place eight years after the government first indicated it would regulate this area.

[English]

There is strong evidence that Canada will not meet its international greenhouse gas 2020 emission reduction target. The federal government does not have an overall plan that maps out how

Canada will achieve this target. Canadians have not been given the details about which regulations will be developed, when, or what greenhouse gas reductions will be expected.

Finally, the federal government has not provided the necessary coordination so that all levels of government working together can achieve the national target by 2020.

Let's turn now to our audit of oil sands monitoring, where the federal government is working with the Province of Alberta to lay the groundwork for more comprehensive monitoring of the environmental effects of oil sands development. Our audit examined Environment Canada's performance under the joint Canada-Alberta implementation plan for oil sands. We found that overall Environment Canada implemented the monitoring projects we examined on time and on budget.

Nonetheless, there remains work to be done. The monitoring information resulting from the projects that are looking at air, water, and biodiversity needs to be better integrated to understand the long-term environmental effects of oil sands development, including cumulative impacts. Environment Canada needs to do a better job of integrating traditional ecological knowledge and engaging first nations, Métis, and other groups. Finally, stakeholders are looking to understand Environment Canada's role in oil sands monitoring beyond March 2015.

[Translation]

Our next audit focused on the services that Environment Canada, Transport Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada provide to support marine navigation in the Arctic. While we found that weather and ice information has improved, we also noted gaps and emerging risks that, if left unaddressed, will only grow as marine traffic increases in the Arctic.

For example, many high-risk areas in the Canadian Arctic are inadequately surveyed and charted. Some of the maps and charts for the Arctic are over 40 years old, and less than a quarter are rated as being "good" by Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

[English]

In addition, the Canadian Coast Guard is having difficulty responding to requests from the shipping industry for new or modified aids to navigation such as beacons and shore lights.

Furthermore, the coast guard has not assessed the risks associated with decreasing icebreaking presence in the Arctic. I'm concerned that there seems to be no overall vision of what the federal government intends to provide in this vast new frontier in terms of modern charts, aids to navigation, and icebreaker services given the anticipated increase in vessel traffic.

[Translation]

In another audit, we examined whether the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, the National Energy Board and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission are taking steps to implement the new 2012 Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

We noted two areas of concern where achieving the objectives of the act are at risk.

The first is that the rationale for recommending projects for environmental assessment is unclear. I am concerned that some significant projects may not be assessed and that decision-makers may not receive the information they need to address environmental impacts.

Our second concern relates to public participation. An objective of the new act was to increase aboriginal engagement. Many groups, including aboriginal peoples, are concerned that they do not have the capacity to participate meaningfully. This reduces the contribution these groups can make and may diminish public confidence in environmental assessments.

• (1535)

[English]

The last audit covered in this report is part of our annual monitoring of how departments are implementing their sustainable development commitments. This year we focused on the use of strategic environmental assessments by selected departments to integrate environmental considerations into their proposals to cabinet and Treasury Board.

While processes have improved, there is still a risk that ministers are not getting complete information on the environmental impacts, both positive and negative, of proposed programs, plans, and policies.

[Translation]

I am also pleased to present our annual report on environmental petitions. This year, we received 16 petitions requesting information from government ministers on a range of environmental topics, including the management of fisheries and threats to environmental and human health posed by toxic substances.

To sum up, as this year's audits show, despite good initiatives and progress in certain areas, there remain many unanswered questions. In many key areas that we looked at, it is not clear how the government intends to address the significant environmental challenges that future growth and development will likely bring about.

[English]

Among other questions, the government does not know what Environment Canada's role will be in oil sands monitoring beyond March 2015. It has not made clear the rationale for which projects

will be subject to environmental assessments, and I am concerned that some significant projects may not be assessed.

It has also not determined what level of service it will provide in the Arctic to support increased navigation and minimize environmental and safety risks. As well, it has not defined a national plan with the provinces and territories to achieve Canada's international greenhouse gas emission reduction target.

I expect the government to have the answers to these questions, and in my report I have made many recommendations, which the departments have accepted.

I look forward to seeing the initiatives that will be put in place in response.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, that concludes my opening remarks.

We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

[English]

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gelfand.

We'll move now to the opening round of seven minutes of questions each, beginning with Mr. Woodworth, please.

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

Thank you for your attendance, Ms. Gelfand and the other officials who are here with you today. I always find that the kind of gap analysis that you folks do is very helpful in improving government services. If Canadians only knew how closely things are examined by your office they'd be very pleased at the high level of excellence there is in the Government of Canada's work.

I was also very happy to read in your chapter, Environmental Monitoring of Oil Sands, that you found that overall Environment Canada implemented the monitoring projects that were examined on time and on budget, and that the department is in the early stages of integrating monitoring results across air, water, and biodiversity. I must say that in contrast to some of your other reports, I found those comments to be very positive.

I wish to ask you about that chapter. I'll begin with the question of the scope of the audit. I'm looking at page 18, from which I understand that the audit in question did not address how the monitoring data was or will be used to fulfill federal legislative and regulatory responsibilities. That seems like a pretty clear statement as it is. Am I right that you did not include how the monitoring data was or will be used?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's correct.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Also in the same paragraph on page 18, there is mention that the audit focused on Environment Canada's responsibility under the joint plan. I understand that to be the joint Canada-Alberta implementation plan for oil sands monitoring, which is described in 2.9 of your report.

Is that correct?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Yes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: All right.

In paragraph 2.9, it says that the joint Canada-Alberta implementation plan is to be implemented by March 31, 2015. It sounds as if it lays out the work that will be required up until that date.

Is that correct?

• (1540)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's correct.

The joint plan is the first step in a longer-term monitoring program that both Canada and Alberta have talked about.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Right.

And did you audit that longer-term plan?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We audited the beginning, the first three years, and how well they're doing in implementing what they said they wanted to do.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: This is what I want to be clear on. I understood that you audited the joint Canada-Alberta implementation plan for oil sands monitoring and that you were not tasked, or you did not choose, to audit the longer-term issues.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's correct.

We audited the implementation of the joint plan.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: And how the monitoring was or will be used falls outside the scope of your audit.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's correct.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I also understand that your recommendation at 2.50, that Environment Canada should identify potential options to build on the foundation of that plan, was sourced mainly in comments from stakeholders.

Am I correct about that?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's right.

When we interviewed stakeholders, they indicated they were interested in knowing whether Environment Canada would participate in the future because they felt that Environment Canada had the capacity and the credibility.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: But the terms of the actual joint Canada-Alberta plan do not speak of options past 2015.

Is that correct?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's correct.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: What I wonder is that if you were departing from auditing the plan in coming to recommendation 2.50, and if you were looking past the plan, what process or rigour did you implement to determine alternative policy options?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We didn't look at alternative policy options.

What we indicated was that the stakeholders are wondering whether Environment Canada will continue in the monitoring of the oil sands, along with the Government of Alberta.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I have a very high regard for the rigour you apply as auditors when you set out the terms of your reference—and I can see that you rigorously examined the government's performance under the joint Canada-Alberta plan—but it concerns

me that in entering into what happens after that plan, you perhaps took in some input but didn't rigorously look for other input.

For example, there may be those who might wish to say that once the plan is completed in 2015, this will devolve to the provinces. I'm a little concerned that what you have in recommendation 2.50 seems to go outside of the scope of the plan you were auditing.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: When I read the recommendation... What we were looking for was that Environment Canada would indicate to stakeholders whether or not it will be involved. It perhaps won't be involved, but Environment Canada and Alberta would discuss that and make a decision.

What we indicate in the report is that stakeholders are asking to find out if Environment Canada will be involved. They may not be involved, and—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Is it unreasonable for me to expect and to suggest that if you are going to audit a plan which is to end in 2015, that you leave policy considerations about what should happen after 2015 out of it?

Is that unreasonable?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Well, I don't believe that my recommendation is a policy recommendation. I believe my recommendation is a recommendation that Environment Canada should simply indicate whether it will or will not be. We are not saying that it should be and we're not saying it shouldn't be. We're saying that stakeholders are asking this question.

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth, we're going to have to leave future questions for another round, but thank you.

We'll move now to Ms. Leslie for seven minutes, please.

• (1545)

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

Thanks to the commissioner and her team for being here.

It's nice to see all of you again.

I want to start with your chapter on environmental assessment. In the report, you say you have concerns that there are projects with serious impacts that may not be subject to environmental assessment. I wonder if you could describe for us what those kinds of projects are.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In our chapter, we mention, as one example, in situ oil sands. Extractions right now are not on the project list that has been developed, so that is one fairly large set of projects that is not on the list.

Ms. Megan Leslie: "In situ" is the vast majority of oil sands development right now.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's correct. In situ is the steam-assisted—it's called SAGD—separation of the sand by drilling holes, separating it, and getting the oil back up.

Ms. Megan Leslie: What would be some other examples of projects that could have serious environmental impacts and would not be assessed?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Well, we looked at the issue of dredging, for example, which won't be part of it. There are a few other examples, such as major chemical plants. There are some industrial mineral mines that would likely not be included.

Bruce may have others.

Mr. Bruce Sloan (Principal, Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development): I think there are some examples. The key point we wanted to raise is transparency on letting people understand how things are on the list or not—the rationale—so it improves the predictability and transparency of the process in the long term.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thank you. That's really helpful.

I want to go on. I don't know if any of you had the time to watch question period today, but probably not. You were probably preparing for this.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Megan Leslie: That's fair.

I did ask the minister a question about your report. She held up a quote—twice, no less—from a stakeholder. Essentially, she was communicating that it was disappointing that the environment commissioner missed.... Actually, I have the text here. It was that the commissioner was “omitting a big detail”, and that is information about cars and trucks and the renewable fuel regulations. It was said that you omitted a large detail when it came to emissions.

I just want to put this out there for you. Are you confident with your section on mitigating climate change? Are you confident with the numbers that say that government will not meet its target?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I am very confident about that. The issues of renewables and the transportation regulations are all detailed in our report. They're all in there.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Okay. Thank you.

My next question is about fast-start financing. I think this is a really important thing that's been overlooked. On the fast-start financing, I'm very glad to see that Canada has fulfilled its commitment both financially and on time. That's really good news, but I am concerned about what kinds of projects are being funded and whether or not they're actually helping us bring down our GHG emissions.

I'm concerned about this because you hear about different projects that are being funded. One thing I heard about was the fact that we're helping to put solar panels on a mine in Chile. I just don't know if that's the kind of project that we meant to fund.

In your section about fast-start financing, you're very clear that you can't audit what's going on in these other countries, but you can audit our contribution. But is that normal? Are other countries just handing over the money and not tracking our emissions progress?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In fact, we're handing over the money and Environment Canada is tracking.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Okay.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: There are two main points on the fast-track financing.

One is that you're correct: the Government of Canada did fulfill its commitment. The money has been taken out of the government's coffers and put into multilateral banks. We recognize, however, that about 73% of it still hasn't hit the ground in terms of the proponents, so that's a concern.

The other one is the issue of the repayability of the loan, so approximately half of that.... That's just simply not made clear.

But we understand that departments are actually watching and tracking that.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Okay. I guess I was incorrect. I guess I'm thinking about the fact that we don't have any information yet about what the emissions reductions are, but they are being tracked.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's correct, and they are tracking.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Okay. Thanks.

Moving on to marine navigation in the Arctic, you have a recommendation for the coast guard. The coast guard needs to “assess the risks associated with projected increases in vessel traffic and changing environmental conditions,” etc.

I'm correct, I think, when I say your audit around marine navigation did not in any way touch on climate change and the impact climate change would have. I don't think that was part of the mandate of your audit.

● (1550)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In the beginning, in the introduction, we do mention that climate change is one of the reasons that vessel traffic will likely increase, but we don't go any further than that.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Right.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We looked at whether we are prepared for increased navigation in the Arctic and whether we have the aids and charts for navigation and whether we are providing the right level of service to increasing numbers of voyages in the Arctic.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Okay. In your recommendation to consider the changing environmental conditions, is it safe to assume that those implicitly include ice levels that are changing because of climate change and the impacts of that climate change? Do the environmental conditions include those?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: They include those.

Ms. Megan Leslie: So it's a recommendation for the government to take action on that.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have forty seconds.

Ms. Megan Leslie: I have forty seconds?

The Chair: Actually you have 33 now.

Ms. Megan Leslie: I'll tack those 33 onto Mr. Bevington's round if that's allowed.

Thank you.

The Chair: We will move on to Mr. Sopuck, please.

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

I'd like to first ask a question regarding a point you made that there are projects for which environmental assessments are not required. You gave examples of some large projects like SAGD and chemical facilities and so on. All of those projects would have to operate under an environmental licence, wouldn't they?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: All those projects would have to...?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: They would have to work under an environmental licence.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We didn't look into that in our audit. We looked at the implementation of the new Environmental Assessment Act.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: But the issue is environmental performance, and all industrial projects in Canada operate under environmental licences with terms and conditions and guidelines for operation. They simply do. That's a simple fact. You would agree with that, wouldn't you?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: All I can tell you is we didn't look into that. I am assuming those would need provincial licences to operate. Is that what you're talking about?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: The issue's not federal or provincial. The implication of your statement is that these people "get away scot-free", and they simply don't.

I did environmental monitoring in the oil sands myself in a previous life, and I was issued a huge book of guidelines that industrial facilities had to abide by. The implication is that these people or these companies put up plants willy-nilly without environmental licences and without any environmental monitoring whatsoever, and that's clearly not the case.

I have another question. You made a statement about the federal government not doing enough to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and "fight climate change".

In Canada what would a successful fight against climate change look like?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: What we looked at, Mr. Sopuck, is the commitment that Canada made to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions from the levels of 2005. The government committed to reducing them by 17% by the year 2020. We looked at whether or not the sector-by-sector regulatory approach and coordination with the provinces would get Canada to that level. That's what we looked at in the audit.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: But that's somewhat of a circular argument.

Let me give you an example. In 1989 the Mulroney government promulgated the pulp and paper effluent regulations mandating the installation of waste water treatment plants at all pulp and paper facilities. The environmental result was cleaner waterways that these plants discharged into. I'm interested in the environmental result.

The reduction of CO₂ is a means to an end, and I'm asking you what that end would be for Canada. What are we going to see in a successful fight against climate change? I mean in Canada in terms of actions taken in Canada.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I understand.

As an auditor, I look at what the government said it was going to do, look at how the government said it was going to do it, and determine whether or not the government is meeting its own objectives.

The government indicated it was going to apply regulations for each sector of the environment, and we found that the government has introduced regulations for the transportation sector and the electricity sector. There are other sectors for which they have not yet introduced those regulations.

So the evidence Environment Canada has, their own data, shows it is highly unlikely that Canada will achieve the target the government set out.

• (1555)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: But don't you think that a regulation should have an environmental result? Again, your words are "to fight climate change". I'm asking you what a successful fight against climate change would look like. What will we end up with? A reduction in CO₂ is not a result, it is a means to an end.

What's the end?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I'm trying to get a better answer for you.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's okay.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Okay, Kim is pointing me to the first paragraph of our chapter 1. The impacts of climate change are impacts that are happening on the ground, and Natural Resources Canada—

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I understand the impacts. How do we change the impacts?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Natural Resources Canada released a report very recently on all the various impacts that Canadians are seeing now due to climate change. If we want to reduce the impact of changing climate, one of the biggest things we need to do is reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. The government has indicated that they want to do this. They've said it is important, and they've set out a regulatory process to do that.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I'll be really blunt. Will reducing CO₂ emissions in Canada change Canada's climate?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: The Government of Canada set out a target to reduce by 17% their emissions, based on 2005 levels, by 2020. The government will not likely achieve that target, based on data from Environment Canada itself.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: You talk about sustainable development. Can you define "sustainable development"?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: There's a common definition out in the public based on the Brundtland Commission report. My description of it is the intersection between a strong economy, a strong society, and a healthy environment. It's the sweet spot in between all three.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Yes. The exact quote is, "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations."

You would agree that the concept of sustainable development is clearly a development concept as well as an environmental concept?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It's the intersection of all three things.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay. It's interesting that in your comments—and again, I do realize I'm looking at a summary—the implication is that sustainable development is an environmental concept, when it's clearly not. It's both...well, the three legs of the stool, as we all know from our work in sustainable development: social, environmental, and economic progress.

Should the government in its sustainable development report also talk about the very successful wealth creation policies that have enriched this country?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In its sustainable development strategies?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Sure.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I believe each ministry reports—should do it and does do it—in its sustainable development strategies, on its successes in all three areas: environmental, social, and economic.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

We'll move now to Mr. McKay for seven minutes.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I wanted to go to chapter 2, recommendation 2.50, with respect to the Canada-Alberta implementation plan, where it says, "...with due consideration for the extent and nature of the Department's future involvement". Mr. Woodworth canvassed this a little bit. Then the department agrees, apparently, that it has to figure out what its future involvement is going to be.

Simultaneously, the Auditor General of Alberta released his comments yesterday about this plan. He said the report lacked clarity and key information and contained inaccuracies. He said that it was disturbing that the report covering the year ending March 31, 2013 was not released until June of this year, nine months after the targeted release date, and that the lack of timeliness made the report less relevant, etc.

It goes on to comment that you, in a separate report—that's the report you just released—took a more positive view toward the joint monitoring program, and then it includes a quote.

Did you have any conversations with the Auditor General of Alberta about this particular program?

• (1600)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In fact, we did. We were aware that they were looking at the reporting part of the joint plan, so there was a commitment to issue a report. We knew that the Auditor General of Alberta was looking at the reporting section.

The scope of our audit was to look at the federal role. We decided to look at Environment Canada's role in implementing the projects that they were responsible for, so we took different parts of the joint plan and looked at different parts, essentially.

Hon. John McKay: You were somewhat complimentary to Environment Canada's role in that project. I think you had 18 projects, or something like that.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Environment Canada was responsible for 38 projects. We examined nine of them in detail. Overall, they were on time and on budget.

Hon. John McKay: You're reasonably happy, putting aside where the future is going with this program. The Auditor General, however, seems to be somewhat unhappy, and in pithier language describes it as something less than world class.

Do you have any observations with respect to his comments?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It is important to look at the period that was covered. We were looking at the implementation of the 2013-14 work plans and the development of the 2014-15 work plans. The Auditor General of Alberta was looking at the year prior to that.

Hon. John McKay: Before that, yes.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It's really important to look at the scope.

Hon. John McKay: Thank you. That's helpful. That's clarifying as well.

Going to the first chapter, page 24, you put forward four charts. The first one pretty well everyone is familiar with. The target is 612 megatonnes. Whether or not that makes Canada more or less green, it's 612. That's the target. That's what you wanted.

Then you add charts B, C, and D. The charts give quite a variance between the low end and the high end of the various impacts of various emissions reductions.

When you say, in 1.63, that Environment Canada could improve decision-makers' climate change reports, is this what you're referring to, that this kind of information should be more readily available to decision-makers so that you can get a better handle on whether the government is going to make its target?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Yes, that's correct. Recommendation 1.63 does refer to the information that we put in the chart, exhibit 1.8.

Hon. John McKay: Environment Canada seems to agree with that idea, that this kind of material should be made available.

What I don't understand, when looking at the charts, is this. It has this LULUCF thing, which I understand has to do with land, use change, and forestry, etc.

For example, two weeks ago the Minister of Natural Resources put a report on the table in the House of Commons about the impact of forest cover. I'm probably simplifying too much, but the argument was that forests in Canada have flipped; instead of being a carbon sink, they're now releasing more carbon than they're taking in. I'm being very simplistic on that. Is that the kind of thing that would be captured with these more nuanced reports?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Yes. Forests, and Canada's forests in particular, can flip between being carbon sinks and carbon sources. So yes, by separating the effects of what's called LULUCF—land use, land use change, and forestry—Canadians would have a better understanding of the impact of land use changes on our greenhouse gas emission targets.

•(1605)

Hon. John McKay: There is a big argument that as, in effect, the treeline moves north, there will be a greater release of methane in particular as permafrost gets released from its current trapped state. Again, would that range in variation be caught by these kinds of charts?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I can't answer that question right now. I think we could get back to you.

The Chair: That would be great, because Mr. McKay's time is up. If you could get back with an answer, that would be very helpful.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We'll get back to you with an answer on that. It's a very specific question around the release of methane as the permafrost—

Hon. John McKay: And around what these charts actually show.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Right: I don't believe that's included in here but I could be wrong, and I don't want to mislead you.

The Chair: Mr. Bevington, five minutes, please.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for joining us today, Commissioner.

You know, with regard to this whole section on Arctic marine navigation, there are things we've talked about in Parliament on numerous occasions about the charting and the coast guard. I want to go to the coast guard, especially this icebreaking capacity. Right around the world, we're seeing a lot of icebreakers being built by a variety of countries. In Canada certainly we're concerned about the fact that although we know the name of an icebreaker that's supposed to be built, we haven't yet seen the hull laid. The name was announced almost six years ago.

Did you do an analysis of the tasks that are currently performed by the icebreaking fleet of Canada, of what would be their ongoing tasks that would take the scheduling of these crafts throughout the Arctic so that we would have a better understanding of how they're being used; of the fact that we're obviously going to be short of a number of ships, for refits or for decommissioning, in the next five to ten years; and of whether these schedules that have been laid out today could be adequately performed with the fleet that would be available five years from now?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: You're asking about a detailed analysis. If you look at paragraph 3.40, you'll see what icebreaking services are provided by the coast guard: ice information, ice routing, escorting individual vessels and convoys, freeing ships beset in ice, maintaining shipping channels and tracks through ice, harbour breakout, and providing supplies for Arctic communities when commercial services are not available.

In general, that is what the coast guard provides.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: You didn't actually look at how their scheduling with the ships they have is configured every year.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I don't believe we went into that level of detail. What we did find was that the coast guard has decreased, by 33 ship days, the total time it plans to deploy in the Arctic. At the same time, we know that vessel traffic is increasing. We recommend that the coast guard improve its performance measurement system to

assess whether icebreaking services will meet user needs in the future.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Now, there's quite a difference in icebreaking capacity between ships. Did you take a look at what ships will be available that can deal with multi-year ice and the more difficult ice conditions?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Mr. Chair, I'm not sure we did as detailed an analysis as Dennis is recommending or is asking in terms of each ship and what they would do. What we did find was that they're on average 30 years old, that we plan to extend the operation of five of the vessels by anywhere from eight to fifteen years, and that there are no other icebreakers of equal capability to replace the vessels undergoing retrofit.

I don't know if we looked at every single icebreaker and what services it provides.

Kim, can you add to that?

•(1610)

Ms. Kimberley Leach (Principal, Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development): We did look at the breakdown. There are six icebreakers that provide services in the Arctic and an additional one that's dedicated to scientific research. Of the six, two are heavy-duty, if you will; three are medium; and one is a high-endurance ship.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: So you would think that we should perhaps be looking at what we're going to have left in five years to understand whether.... As you say, the two most capable icebreakers will be decommissioned. Are we going to have enough capacity to deal with...? I mean, we're dealing with an Arctic that's fairly large, one of the largest Arctic systems in the world, and where ice shifting is now unpredictable in terms of where the heavy ice will be.

Was there any sense that there needs to be an icebreaker on either side of the islands in order to deal with the issues we have? I notice today that we have another community that's suffering because multi-year ice moved in and they can't get their resupply. This has happened over and over again. What it says is that you need icebreakers in various locations.

The Chair: Mr. Bevington, we're going to need to cut you off there. We've given you extra time.

Thank you for that rhetorical comment.

We'll move now to Mr. Toet, for five minutes, please.

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

Thank you, Commissioner. It's good to have you here.

In a couple of places in your opening remarks you said you were concerned that some significant projects may not be assessed. In your closing statement you also mentioned that again.

Did you find any significant projects that have not been assessed since the implementation of CEAA 2012 in July 2012?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Specifics?

I'm going to pass it over to Bruce for that level of specificity.

Mr. Bruce Sloan: With this audit we were trying to look at the systems and practices that the department has put in place to contribute to the success of the new act, so we didn't get into looking at new projects.

A lot of them are still going through the EA process, so the office tries to stay away from commenting on projects that are in the middle of hearings. We didn't look at specific projects, rather this infrastructure that the department and the three organizations have been putting in place.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: So when you went through this process, you could not identify whether there were any projects that should have been assessed that were not assessed.

Mr. Bruce Sloan: We didn't look for that. We looked for whether the three responsible authorities were setting out their rationales for which projects they are in, and which projects they are not. That's aimed at getting transparency and predictability around the process, which is one of the objectives of an EA process.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: You had that concern, but you did not look to see if your concern was justified at all.

Mr. Bruce Sloan: Not in this audit.

Our strategic audit plans have a series of audits that will look at the EA process over time. I think that is an issue we'll be coming back to within the next short period of time. We can't deal with everything in one audit.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: The CEAA 2012 is a brand new piece of legislation.

We're only two years into it, so the idea was to do.... You have a name for it—

Mr. Bruce Sloan: It's analogous to a systems under development audit.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Right. It's a systems under development audit. That's very specific language for auditors.

We were basically looking at how well they were doing in the implementation right at the front end of a new law, as a way of trying to provide guidance and help if things are kind of off track.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I appreciate that, but when you mentioned it twice in your opening statement, it seems to me you would have had real reason to believe that some projects had been missed.

Anyway, going on, under chapter 6, when you talk about progress in implementing sustainable development strategies, you talk about processes having been approved. Then you also mention that "there is still a risk that ministers are not getting complete information on the environmental impacts of proposed programs, plans, and policies".

Again, can you cite any cases where ministers did not get the information they required, based on your assessment here?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We looked through memorandums to cabinet and Treasury Board submissions, and we looked in particular at approximately 47 of them.

A voice: It was 45.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In about a third of the cases, there was information that stopped before it got to ministers. It was both positive impacts on the environment that did not go up to ministers and negative impacts on the environment.

Now due to the secrecy of the documents, I don't believe we can be specific about those. Is that correct?

• (1615)

Mr. James McKenzie (Principal, Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development): No, we can't.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: But we did look at 45 of them. We found that in two-thirds, the cabinet directive was being properly applied. In one-third of the cases, there was information, as I say, with positive environmental impact that was not getting to the ministers, as well as some with negative impacts. The cabinet directive was not being properly followed, and the information should have gone up to the minister.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Okay, thank you.

I would like to pass the remainder of my time to Mr. Woodworth, if he would like to continue.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you very much.

I would like to continue our earlier conversation about paragraph 2.50, chapter 2, and the suggestion that there should be some policy going forward past the plan and the implementation of it. It seems that you're suggesting the design of the joint Canada-Alberta plan would have been improved if it had provided for post-2015 planning.

Is that what you're really suggesting?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I don't believe I am, Mr. Woodworth.

I believe that the first three years of the implementation of this plan is what we audited. It has always been the intention of that original document that you mentioned, to do a long....

Monitoring takes many years. We need decades of information. We looked at the first three years, and we made a recommendation about something beyond March 2015.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: What I'm concerned about is that if the scope of your audit was to determine Environment Canada's performance under that three-year plan by suggesting that something more should happen after that's complete, you're really giving us a critique on the design of that plan. You're saying that design should have included a post-2015 element. If you're giving us such a critique, I want to know what rigour you've applied to be critical of that design.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Woodworth. That's a good question. We'll have to wait for an answer for that one for later.

Ms. Duncan, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and it's terrific to see you here. Congratulations, Commissioner, on your appointment. It was a great first report.

I would like to go to chapter 4 and one of my favourite subjects, equivalency. I would have to say right off the bat on section 4.58 I'm a little stunned at your finding that the agency has ensured conditions in place for substituting provincial for federal ones. The reason I'm a little stunned by that conclusion is in your report at 4.61 you state that the agency has not even yet developed practices or conditions that would allow them to even assess whether or not a provincial review process could replace a federal one.

As I understand only British Columbia, according to your report, has an MOU. This has been an ongoing debate going right back to Minister Sheila Copps at a meeting in Whitehorse where two ministers duked it out.

I'm concerned about this because we have a clear Supreme Court of Canada decision in the Oldman case that the federal government does share jurisdiction over the environment. An obvious place is transboundary impacts, impacts on first nations and Métis or Inuit, and fisheries, unilateral federal jurisdiction, which the provincial government cannot make a ruling on or regulate in. The provincial boards have been very clear on that.

Secondly, you have also identified in your report on both environmental assessment and monitoring that there has been some failure in meaningful participation of first nations and Métis.

Thirdly, to just give you one example, at the recent TransCanada pipeline hearing in Alberta, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation was forced to pull out because they were denied initially even access to a review of the environmental assessment report. They wanted to make the determination before it was even released. Then they were given a mere 24 hours to review an extremely complex report.

With all of that, I look forward to you explaining your finding in 4.58.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: This is a very technical question, and so I am going to pass it over to Bruce to help with this.

Mr. Bruce Sloan: The government or the agency has entered into some substitution agreements in British Columbia to cover eight specific sites. In doing that they consider if the agency carried out the assessment, what are....

• (1620)

Ms. Linda Duncan: I'm specifically interested in Alberta by the way.

Mr. Bruce Sloan: In Alberta there are no substitution agreements as at this point in time.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Exactly.

Mr. Bruce Sloan: But we did look at the process the agency used to establish where they do exist, and the steps the agency takes to say "if we are going to do the agency, we'd do these X, Y, and Z things to make sure the provincial process includes that, or we'll add that to the normal provincial process".

The agency did carry out some work to enter into those substitution agreements. That is as at the time of our audit the only province where substitution agreements had been established.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I won't dwell on it, but my concern is that, despite substitution or equivalency agreements, the record in Alberta has been that we simply either don't do CEAA assessment at all...and

there are no longer joint review panels. Absent an agreement, how is it that the federal assessments are not proceeding where those projects may impact first nations and fisheries?

I'll just leave it at that. I look forward to follow-up as CEAA is being implemented.

In the brief time I have left I'd like to follow up on what my colleague raised about monitoring. I also noted quite different reports by the Auditor General of Alberta—mind you, he was looking at what the Alberta government is doing—compared with your audit. But they are joint reports, and the Alberta auditor reported that these joint reports lacked clarity, and key information contained inaccuracies. They raised a concern that there's a lack of information-sharing between the two levels of government. The first public report wasn't transparent, and the first public report contained inaccuracies.

You have identified some things the federal government could do better, but I remain puzzled that the federal report seems somewhat more glowing than the provincial Auditor General review of exactly the same joint program.

It's a different year? Is that the difference?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It's two different things. It's a different timeframe. It's also a different thing—thing one and thing two—in terms of what was audited. They looked at what was contained in the report. We looked at Environment Canada and the work plans, the projects on the ground, and how well Environment Canada was doing in implementing its share of the monitoring projects. So it's really a question of very different scopes.

In the case of Alberta, it was a different timeframe, so it's the first public report. In our case, it's the second year of monitoring programs and projects, and how well they're doing. Overall, they're doing well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to our last questioner for this session, Mr. Sopuck, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you.

I was interested in your comments on land use in particular, especially in terms of forests. You mentioned that forests can emit carbon dioxide on a net basis, and other times there are carbon sinks. Which type of forest does what?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: The information that I got was from a recent report from Natural Resources Canada. I don't have the level of detail in that question off the top of my head, but we could get back to you on that. It would be in the NRCan report, I'm pretty sure.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Is it fair to say that a young, growing forest would largely take in carbon dioxide on a net basis versus an older forest?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That's probably basic science, but I—

Mr. Robert Sopuck: This is a scientific report.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It is, but I'm an auditor, and I can only do what I do.

The Chair: You're auditing the program.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: In the land use areas as well, the literature is fairly clear that wetlands can make very significant carbon sinks. Did you look at the issue of wetland loss in Canada and the effect on CO₂ emissions?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Not in this report, no, we did not.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: In oil sands monitoring, did you look at what's going on in remediation of land that has been mined for open-pit mines?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In terms of the monitoring?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Yes.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We looked at the monitoring projects under air, water, and biodiversity. These are very specific sites. I got to see some. I watched them dig up soil samples along one of the rivers, I watched a canoe go by with some young scientists who were going into the bush to set up the cameras to look at the wildlife. These monitoring projects are happening. Environment Canada is responsible for 38 of them, and we looked at nine of them in detail. Overall, they're on time and on budget.

• (1625)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Does monitoring occur on sites that they have remediated after the mining? Of course, they've got to revegetate the site. Is there monitoring going on at those revegetated sites?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I can get back to you on that. I don't have that information. I don't know if the revegetated sites are one of the monitoring sites, but there are quite a lot...there are maps of all the various sites for the water monitoring, the air monitoring, and the biodiversity monitoring. They're very detailed, and they're probably available in the report.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Is the ongoing biodiversity monitoring adequate in your mind? I'm just focusing on biodiversity now.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We didn't look at the scientific part of that. We looked at whether there were work plans. Environment Canada was responsible for all the biodiversity monitoring. As I said, Environment Canada was responsible for 38 projects. We looked at nine of the biggest ones. We did not assess the scientific accuracy. As part of the joint oil sands monitoring plan, one of the steps is to have the whole plan peer-reviewed. The science behind it will all be looked at by scientists. We looked at the management. Are they on time, are they on budget? Overall, the answer for the nine that we looked at was yes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Because in point number 8, you say:

The monitoring information resulting from the projects that are looking at air, water and biodiversity needs to be better integrated to understand the long term environmental effects of oils sands development...

That sounds like an evaluation of the program.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Part of the program was that the information coming from all these different monitoring sites and these three component areas was an integration strategy and was supposed to be developed. We see the very beginning of an integration strategy. We make a recommendation that this integration strategy be fully fleshed out. That's one of the components of the job.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's fine.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank you, Ms. Gelfand, Mr. Ferguson, Mr. Sloan, Ms. Leach, and Mr. McKenzie, for being with us today.

We're going to have a three-minute recess and then we'll reconvene with departmental officials.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Chair: I'd like to reconvene as quickly as possible, please. We want to give our witnesses as much time as possible.

We welcome now from the department: Chris Forbes, assistant deputy minister; Karen Dodds, assistant deputy minister; Dan McDougall, assistant deputy director; and Mike Beale, assistant deputy minister. From the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency we welcome Ron Hallman, president, and Helen Cutts, vice-president.

Welcome. Thank you for being here today.

I understand that Mr. Hallman has an opening statement. Or is it Mr. Forbes?

Mr. Chris Forbes (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch and Regional Directors General Offices, Department of the Environment): I think we both do. We'll stick to 10 minutes.

The Chair: Ten each or together?

Mr. Chris Forbes: That's combined.

The Chair: Proceed, Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Chris Forbes: First of all, thanks for having us here today.

I'm here today on behalf of our deputy minister, Michael Martin, who could not join us. As you mentioned, Chair, I'm joined by colleagues, ADMs from across the department.

The focus of my remarks will be on the first three chapters of the commissioner's report, which address mitigating climate change, environmental monitoring, and marine navigation in the Canadian Arctic.

[Translation]

I would first like to thank the new commissioner for her report and acknowledge the co-operation and engagement of those professionals who conducted the audits. The department greatly appreciates their work.

I would also like to point out that Environment Canada has agreed with all the Commissioner's recommendations.

[English]

In a review of the government's work on climate change mitigation, the commissioner found that Environment Canada is providing Canadians with robust and methodologically sound information on future greenhouse gas emissions and that our reports and forecasts present information in an objective manner and in accordance with international reporting guidelines.

Environment Canada agrees with the commissioner's recommendations to strengthen its planning process. Climate change is a shared responsibility in Canada. We take our leadership role seriously and will continue working with other departments, other levels of government, stakeholders, and consumers to address this challenge.

As an example, this September, the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment agreed to discuss climate change issues on an ongoing basis.

The government's contribution is implementing its sector-by-sector approach to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. To date, action has been taken on two of Canada's largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions: the transportation and electricity sectors.

• (1635)

[Translation]

In 2012, the department introduced regulations that made Canada the first major coal user to ban construction of traditional coal-fired electricity generation units. These regulations are expected to result in a cumulative reduction in greenhouse gas emissions that amounts to removing 2.6 million vehicles from the road each year over a 21-year period.

In the transportation sector, as a result of the department's regulatory initiatives, it is projected that 2025 model year light-duty vehicles will produce about 50% less greenhouse gas emissions than 2008 vehicles. Moreover, last month, the environment minister announced a series of new initiatives that will increase fuel efficiency for cars and trucks, reduce emissions from heavy-duty vehicles and lower sulphur content in gasoline. The minister also announced the government's intent to take regulatory action to reduce and prevent emissions of hydrofluorocarbons or HFCs.

I should point out that several of the department's key policies, such as the regulations for coal-fired power plants and vehicles will also produce significant reductions beyond the 2020 timeframe.

[English]

We are making some progress. In 2012 Canada's greenhouse gas emissions were 5.1% lower than they were in 2005, while the economy grew by 10.6% over that same period. Today, Canada's per capita greenhouse gas emissions are at their lowest level since tracking began in 1990. As we continue to move ahead, Environment Canada remains committed to working in concert with the provinces and territories to further these results.

The commissioner also recognizes that the government's fast-start financing initiative is being delivered effectively. The Government of Canada has fully met its financing commitment, having provided \$1.2 billion to support a range of climate change projects in more than 60 developing countries, including \$680 million to multilateral banks to mobilize private sector investment. As recommended by the commissioner, Environment Canada will continue working with its partners to apply lessons learned from this experience. The department is committed to transparency. It will continue producing forecasts and reports regularly as well as providing Canadians with solid information about greenhouse gas emissions.

Turning to the report's review of environmental monitoring of the oil sands, the commissioner found Environment Canada successful

in implementing its oil sands monitoring projects on time and on budget. As the committee members are aware, responsible resource development is a priority and a responsibility of both the federal and provincial governments.

[Translation]

Environment Canada has made significant progress since the launch of the joint implementation plan for oil sands monitoring with Alberta. We are already working with Alberta to define roles past 2015. Likewise, the department is also continuing to look for opportunities to enhance this program. This includes engagement with stakeholders, including first nations and Métis communities in monitoring of the oil sands, which Environment Canada and Alberta have been doing since the start of the joint plan.

Most recently, we have been collaborating on the development of a revised consultation process that seeks to address issues raised by aboriginal people with a view to achieving increased influence of traditional ecological knowledge in monitoring and more opportunities for the identification and effective inclusion of such knowledge.

[English]

Finally, I'd like to turn your attention to the commissioner's review of marine navigation in the Canadian Arctic. There was an aspect of this audit that touched on Environment Canada's responsibilities. The commissioner has recognized our support to date for safe marine navigation in the Arctic, pointing to the department's improved weather and ice formation information.

With regard to our observations on the long-term needs for supporting marine navigation in the Arctic, departments are actively working together, in consultation with key stakeholders in Canada's north, to develop a long-term strategy for safe Arctic marine transportation.

Environment Canada will continue to monitor and assess any impacts arising from changes to ice surfaces in the Arctic, as recommended by the commissioner. In keeping with the commissioner's recommendations, Canada is also taking action to ensure enhanced marine safety in the north through its work as the chair of the Arctic Council. It's focusing on safe Arctic shipping and collating a program to enhance safety of cruise ships in the Arctic. As the government moves forward, it intends to continue working with key partners in Canada's north to promote and enhance safe Arctic marine transportation.

That ends my opening remarks. We'll be happy to take questions.

•(1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Forbes.

We'll move to Mr. Hallman for his statement, and then we'll go to the questions later.

Mr. Hallman.

Mr. Ron Hallman (President, Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency): Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to be here today in support of the committee's consideration of the Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development's fall 2014 report on the implementation of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012.

[Translation]

First, let me thank the commissioner and the auditors for the work that was done in carrying out the audit.

[English]

As an organization whose ongoing success depends upon a firm commitment to continuous improvement, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency has accepted the commissioner's feedback and recommendations specifically as detailed in chapter 4 of the report.

The commissioner recognized that CEAA 2012 was still in its very early stages of implementation during the conduct of the audit. In fact, the audit began just shy of 18 months after the coming into force of the act. As such, the auditors focused on key aspects of the act that they felt were relevant for that period in the implementation process, notably our environmental assessment processes and aboriginal engagement and consultation.

I'm very pleased to note the chapter's overall finding that the agency has indeed put in place the systems, practices, and procedures to support effective environmental assessment. I appreciate the report's highlighting of specific achievements, including the implementation of systems and practices to meet new legislated timelines, to assist with public participation, and to reduce duplication of environmental assessment processes.

With the second anniversary of the coming into force of the act having just recently passed, I can tell you that I'm very proud of the remarkable work of so many agency employees in leading and coordinating the activities that have resulted in these achievements to date.

[Translation]

I look forward to many more achievements as the ongoing implementation of the act continues.

[English]

I take very seriously, Mr. Chair, the feedback and recommendations of the commissioner, which make particularly clear the need to enhance the clarity and public availability of information about key environmental assessment processes being applied under CEAA 2012, as well as the ongoing need to continually seek opportunities to strengthen aboriginal engagement and consultation. In the agency's response to the report, we have committed to doing exactly

this as we work to continuously improve upon the manner in which we implement the legislation on behalf of Canadians.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This concludes my opening remarks.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you to both of you. I hope that I can ask my committee members to be as wise with their use of time as our first two guests were.

We're going to move now to the opening round of questions. We'll begin with Mr. Carrie, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Coming from Oshawa, I'm always interested in the auto sector. I've seen the challenges with automotive manufacturing here in Canada, and the challenges to make sure that Canada remains competitive on a North American basis.

Our government has already taken action in two of Canada's largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions, the transportation and the electricity sectors. I was wondering if you could explain to the committee the newest transportation regulations that were announced two weeks ago by the minister when she was in New York.

Mr. Mike Beale (Assistant Deputy Minister, Environmental Stewardship Branch, Department of the Environment): The minister recently announced the second phase of our light-duty vehicle regulations. The first phase, which is already in place, addresses vehicles up to the 2016-model year. We had previously published draft regulations for the next phase, which would go from 2017 and onwards. The final regulations for that second phase are what the Minister announced in New York. Those were published today in the *Gazette*. Those regulations are aligned with those of the United States, which for us is really important given the integration of the industry across the board. What they really do is drive the emissions from vehicles such that in 2025, we expect a passenger vehicle to emit half as many greenhouse gases as a 2008 vehicle. A 2008 vehicle represents a significant improvement over the last number of years.

It's really a dramatic improvement that puts Canada and the U.S. among the world leaders in vehicle emissions.

The other point I should make is that we do that by also reducing the amount of fuel these vehicles need to burn, which means less fuel that the consumer needs to buy. As a result, we expect significant savings to vehicle users such that the incremental cost of one of these vehicle purchases due to the regulations will, we expect, be recovered by the consumer in one to three years.

•(1645)

Mr. Colin Carrie: We're good.

I was wondering too, do you have a number? I've heard that it's the equivalent of taking 2.6 million vehicles off the road. Is that accurate?

Mr. Mike Beale: Yes, that is accurate.

Mr. Colin Carrie: That's excellent.

When you're looking at the environment, people complain that we tend to work in silos. I was wondering if you could describe to the committee the work that Environment Canada is doing alongside the provinces and territories to improve our environmental record and reduce Canada's overall greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Yes. I'll talk, and certainly my colleagues can add comments.

We talk to the provinces in a number of different fora. At the officials level the deputy minister meets with his provincial counterparts on a regular basis to discuss regulatory actions, and my colleagues do as well. For example, Dan would meet with the provinces to talk to them a bit about the work that's going on in the international fora and the implications there. As I mentioned in my remarks, at the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, there was an agreement earlier this fall to work together, to talk about climate change going forward, both mitigation and adaptation.

The final point I guess I'd make on that front—and Mike can certainly add to this—is that one of the things that's been important to us as we do this sector-by-sector regulatory approach is to look at equivalency of regulations with the provinces and make sure that we're not duplicating and increasing the regulatory burden unnecessarily. There's a lot of work that goes on with provinces to make sure that where it works for a province and for the federal government, we can reach equivalency agreements to achieve the same environmental outcome, but with one set of regulations.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Are there any further comments?

Mr. Mike Beale: Maybe I could just add a few words on the regulatory side. As part of the sector-by-sector regulatory approach, we have working groups established with respect to different sectors. I would say there's a significant involvement of provinces in that work.

In addition, there's a series of bilateral engagements with, as Chris indicated, a view to trying to make sure that Canadian industry is not being hit twice, for example, with different regulations, or that there are not two different kinds of regulations applying to them. Equivalency agreements are really important there.

We have published very recently the final equivalency agreement with respect to our coal-fired electricity regulations with the Province of Nova Scotia. The order standing down the federal regulations will be forthcoming. What it means is that for a federal regulation, we look at what the province is doing, and if the province is achieving the same outcome through its own regulations, then we can stand down the federal regulations. In a sense, it's a win for the environment, but it's also a win for the province, because it takes account of the specific circumstances of the province.

Mr. Colin Carrie: That's excellent.

As the government moves forward with the plan for the sector-by-sector approach to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, I was wondering if you could elaborate a little more and explain to the committee how this tailored approach is achieving results.

• (1650)

Mr. Mike Beale: We've talked about the vehicle regulations. The magnitude of those emission reductions is really very significant.

On the coal-fired electricity regulations, similarly, we were able to tailor them to the circumstances of the sector. In the area of coal-fired electricity, we were facing a situation where we had a fleet of coal plants that in many cases were nearing the end of their useful life. The approach taken was tailored to those specific circumstances to say, okay, would it make sense that when a plant then reaches a certain number in terms of its end of useful life, that plant either has to meet a stringent performance standard or it closes down?

The Chair: Okay. Hopefully we'll have time to come back and finish that thought, or perhaps you can continue that off-line. I want to respect the time.

Mr. Choquette, please, for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us today.

You say that you accept the commissioner's recommendations. However, one of the most important findings in the report is that, in all likelihood, you will not achieve the Copenhagen Accord target.

Is it also your conclusion that you will not achieve that target?

Mr. Chris Forbes: The recommendation was that we plan our efforts better with the provinces and other federal departments. We accept the commissioner's recommendation that we work better with our colleagues in other departments and with the provinces and territories. We accepted that recommendation.

As for whether we will achieve the 17% target, I think that in this case the commissioner referred to our forecasts in the document entitled

[*English*]

“Canada's Emissions Trends”.

[*Translation*]

This document dates from last year. My feeling is that this is a forecast and that the figures have to be considered in that light. It includes only the measures that are in force or have already been announced. It does not include other potential measures.

Mr. François Choquette: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I don't have much time left.

Mr. Chris Forbes: That's okay.

Mr. François Choquette: As you said, the report points to a lack of coordination with the provinces. I believe I recall that two main committees meet, but one of them met only once, in 2011. It is clear that coordination is a problem.

That said, when we talk about coordination with the provinces, it is important to point out that they are doing their part. In fact, most of the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions will be due to action taken by the provinces.

What real steps will you take in the coming year to improve coordination with the provinces with a view to achieving the Copenhagen Accord target?

Mr. Chris Forbes: As Mr. Beale explained, we hold many bilateral and multilateral discussions with the provinces. These discussions are probably not regular enough, but we discuss almost all our initiatives with the provinces.

I believe I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation that the environment ministers met in Prince Edward Island in September. The ministers will look at these issues next year at their next meeting. In preparation for that event, there will be a series of meetings between federal and provincial environment department officials.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you.

Because I don't have much time left, I will ask you three questions all at once. You can take the time you need to answer each one.

The first question is about your draft regulations for the oil and gas sector, which have been around for a year. According to the commissioner's report, the consultations were very limited.

Why were they so restricted and the group so limited?

Why are the draft regulations still not available after a year?

As politicians, we would at least like to look at them.

On page 16 of chapter 1, the commissioner asks four very specific questions, including these two:

What additional or more stringent regulations will be needed in sectors already subject to regulation, and when?

Which additional sectors does the federal government plan on regulating, and when?

You said you intended to answer these four questions.

Are you promising to do so in a year?

That more or less sums up my concerns.

Lastly, I would like to talk about the western chorus frog.

I'd just like to know if you are going to issue the famous emergency protection order.

Do you have any news about that?

I'm sorry to bombard you with questions. I will let you have the floor.

• (1655)

Mr. Chris Forbes: I suppose it is better to answer your questions in the order in which you asked them, starting with the one about working with the provinces.

Mr. Mike Beale: I will answer in English, if I may.

[English]

When I look at paragraph 1.19 of the commissioner's report, the commissioner states that "detailed regulatory proposals have been available internally for over a year". She doesn't say regulations. "Regulatory proposals" is a broader concept that involves more

initial work to develop a set of regulations, and that work certainly is well under way.

The consultations have been on the regulatory framework. We have consulted with all the relevant provinces that have oil and gas interests and we've consulted widely with industry.

With respect to further consultations, again, I would draw your attention to our response on paragraph 1.25, where we point out that Environment Canada has a practice of consulting with stakeholders on draft regulations pre- and post-publication. That is our practice and we will continue to follow that practice, including with respect to—

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I don't have much time left.

Could you answer the other two questions in writing in the weeks to come? I don't have time to listen to your answers. Is that possible?

Mr. Chris Forbes: We will try.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: We'll move now to Ms. Ambler, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, officials, for being here with us this afternoon.

I would like to begin with Mr. Hallman because I have a bit of an interest....I think a number of us on this side of the table were participants in the statutory review process of the CEAA, so I was particularly interested in that part of the commissioner's report.

You mentioned that the commissioner highlighted specific achievements of the Environmental Assessment Act, including the implementation of systems and practices to meet new legislated timelines, assist with public participation, and reduce duplication of environmental assessment processes. I consider them achievements of the statutory review because those were being called for at the time a couple of years ago. I'm happy to see that they're being implemented and successfully so.

In particular, I wanted to know if you could tell us a bit about how the government is working to increase aboriginal involvement in environmental monitoring, which is part of the public participation piece of the CEAA.

•(1700)

Mr. Ron Hallman: Mr. Chair, the agency has a flexible and comprehensive framework for engaging aboriginal groups in the conduct of an environmental assessment. From the time that we receive a project description from a proponent right through to a minister's decision statement and well beyond that, when a project is actually being brought to life and constructed, we meet with aboriginal groups. We have crown consultation coordinators in each of the regions who actually go into communities and meet with aboriginal groups, their representatives, and their elders to discuss the project description, to get feedback on the perspective of the aboriginal group on the types of impacts that the project might have on their rights or interests, on the types of mitigations that might help to address or accommodate, where appropriate, those impacts and those interests, even to the point of talking about potential conditions in the event the project is ultimately allowed to proceed.

So right through the entire process, we work with aboriginal groups. We even bring departmental experts from other federal departments to come into the community with us to help raise that level of understanding and communication and capacity of first nations to understand what the project is about and what the potential impacts are, so that when the proponent is issued environmental impact statement guidelines, they reflect the concerns of the aboriginal groups. When the proponent submits their environmental impact statement and the agency prepares its report, which is then shared publicly as well, the interests and participation of aboriginal groups are reflected in that, and they go out for further consultation with public and aboriginal groups.

We believe that under the new act and with the funding that is provided by the government for the participant funding program, we are doing a very effective job of engaging aboriginal groups in the conduct of EAs.

One recommendation that the commissioner made, which we have accepted, is that the agency will need to have a structured or systematic approach to engaging aboriginal groups in discussions on policy and future policy issues related to the implementation of the act. I mention that because, as you may remember, this audit started 18 months after the act was proclaimed. In those first 18 months and the months since then, the agency has been very engaged in adjusting our business processes to be able to respond to the consultation requirements, and to be able to respond to and deliver on legislative timeframes, etc.

Now, as the act becomes a little more mature, we expect that policy areas will arise. We will want to discuss those with the public, with other stakeholders, and certainly with aboriginal groups. We will be looking for opportunities to structure meaningful dialogue with them that responds to their needs, that does so in such a way that they would like to be engaged, and that still respects the provisions of the act in terms of legislative timeframes.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thank you. It sounds like the agency is doing a very effective job of that.

Would you say that all of these measures and this structured approach that you've described have increased the transparency of the EA process?

Mr. Ron Hallman: Whether there's a panel review or an agency-led review, the agency collects all the information, and all of that information is available in the public file on that project. So in that regard, I believe it's very transparent. All of that information is available to Canadians upon request. A good deal of that information is posted on the agency's public registry.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: That's good to know. Thank you.

My next question is actually about hydrofluorocarbons. Not being a scientist, but having lots of constituents who write to me about various concerns, I know that folks are concerned about their health and the health of their families. They write to me about everything from genetically modified foods to greenhouse gas emissions. Among the GHGs, of course, that I suppose are the most polluting are the HFCs, the hydrofluorocarbons.

I'm wondering if perhaps, Mr. Forbes, you could highlight the heavy-duty regulations and the intention to regulate hydrofluorocarbons that were announced a couple of weeks ago by the minister

•(1705)

The Chair: Ms. Ambler, it will have to be very, very highlight, because we're going to have to move on.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: That was not seven minutes, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It was actually quite a bit over.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: No.

The Chair: We'll proceed with Mr. McKay.

Seven minutes, please.

Hon. John McKay: I want to get to those highlights.

Mr. Forbes, the commissioner states, "In our view, the lack of a clear plan and an effective planning process is a particularly significant gap given that Canada is currently projected to miss its 2020 emission reduction target."

Do you agree with that statement?

Mr. Chris Forbes: I started this comment, I think, with Mr. Choquette's question. We have a projection of emissions going forward based on measures that are currently in place, announced and currently in place.

That doesn't tell us about what the effects are of any future actions at the federal level, provincial-territorial level—

Hon. John McKay: We're a little bit down the road on this. This is 2015, effectively.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Well, we're basing our projections off the 2012 national inventory report data, and we project forward.

There are two things I would say, as a forecaster, in response to that. I think there are uncertainties about what future actions will be taken and what the impacts of those are—

Hon. John McKay: If you don't agree with her statement, why didn't you say so in your response?

Mr. Chris Forbes: We respond to the recommendation. And the recommendation, I can look back to it—

Hon. John McKay: But you have an opportunity to review the reports before you—

The Chair: Mr. McKay, let him complete his response.

Hon. John McKay: If you don't mind, Chair, I'll just ask—

The Chair: Okay, well, if we're going to ask questions, we need to give a chance for a reply.

Hon. John McKay: You have an opportunity to review the report prior to its being published. I would have thought that if you felt that this was either an inaccurate statement or was wrong, or was a projection, you would have said so in your response to the commissioner rather than agreeing.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Again, the response was a response to the recommendation itself, which was focused on the planning process that the commissioner was recommending. So what we were accepting.... Quite honestly, as a public servant, we can always do better at some of these things. The recommendation was clear that we needed to work on a planning process with other federal departments, engaging provinces and territories—

Hon. John McKay: If you clearly believe there's no factual basis for the commissioner's view, that her view is based upon a projection, then presumably...and it's a projection widely shared among pretty well everybody outside of the Department of the Environment. I would have thought that for the point of clarification, for the point of defending the department, you would have said, "Well, we don't actually agree with that statement".

Mr. Chris Forbes: In terms of the process we go through, we discuss the report with the commissioner, and we focus our formal response on the recommendations. That's what we've put on paper there.

Hon. John McKay: But she says in the recommendation that you should get "a quantitative description", you should get "a detailed description", you should get "a regulatory review", you should get "a regular report". And you agree to that.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Yes.

Hon. John McKay: In light of the sentence she has prior to that, you're basically saying that you're going to give up smoking by smoking.

Mr. Chris Forbes: I guess I hadn't thought of it that way. My take on it was that—

A voice: He probably hasn't even started smoking.

Hon. John McKay: Yes, I gave it up when I was eight years old.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. John McKay: The point is that if you continue to dig your hole, if you continue to do the same thing over and over again—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. McKay, there's a point of order.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I rather agreed with the chair's intervention earlier, that when Mr. McKay asks a question, he should allow the witness to answer it first. I thought the witness was in the course of trying to answer Mr. McKay's question when Mr. McKay intervened and asked another question.

So some courtesy would be appreciated.

Thank you.

Hon. John McKay: Well, I appreciate the courtesy of not interrupting. Thank you.

The issue here is that she makes recommendations, you agree with her recommendations, and your agreement is that we'll continue doing what we're already doing.

• (1710)

Mr. Chris Forbes: A lot of the things we're doing now we think are good practices. We've discussed some of them already in some of our responses in terms of how we engage with the provinces, the kinds of publications we put out, whether it be emissions trends or whether it be our reporting to the United Nations. We think we are doing a lot of good transparent reporting and we are engaging in a lot of discussions with our colleagues.

I guess—

Hon. John McKay: Do you think it's a great practice to continue to negotiate with the oil and gas industry? Paragraph 1.19 states, "Although detailed regulatory proposals have been available internally for over a year, the federal government has consulted on them only privately, mainly using a small working group...." When was the last time you actually met with oil and gas?

And where are these regulations? Are they sitting on the minister's desk?

Mr. Chris Forbes: That's a lot of questions in one.

I guess—

Hon. John McKay: That way I don't have to interrupt you.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Touché.

Hon. John McKay: I'm not going to interrupt you while—

Mr. Chris Forbes: It's getting a bit.... It's moving too fast for me right now.

Just in response to one of those points, and Mike earlier mentioned it, this is about regulatory proposals and discussions. I'm not sure about all the discussions that have gone on with the oil and gas sector, but these are about regulatory proposals, not regulations—

Hon. John McKay: We're in the year of our Lord 2014.

Mr. Chris Forbes: I'm aware of that, yes.

Hon. John McKay: And we have a target of 2020. All of your data says—including what the commissioner says—that you're going to miss. You haven't even tabled the oil and gas regulatory proposals.

Is that it? Have I got it?

Mr. Chris Forbes: Again, I guess what I would say—

Hon. John McKay: I hope that that's all factual.

Is it?

Mr. Chris Forbes: Well, I'd go back to the projections, and what I would say about those projections is that they tell you the difference between where we would be with all of the measures that have been announced in place, versus the target.

That doesn't tell you that you're going to miss. It tells you the gap you have to address under current economic projections. That's what that tells you.

Hon. John McKay: Well, I guess if I'm going off the cliff and I don't put my foot on the brake, there's a projection that I'm going to go on.

Mr. Chris Forbes: I would have to respectfully say that I think it tells you what the cumulative effect of the things you would need to do to meet that target would be. Whether we get those done or not will depend on actions at a number of levels of government—actions of individuals, businesses—and I think that is to be determined.

Hon. John McKay: But all of your charts on page 24, the ones you've published, plus the ones that the commissioner thinks you should publish, are all going in the wrong direction. They are all going up, not down.

We are five years away from Copenhagen. It's a little difficult to accept that these are merely trends and that something might happen to reverse that trend.

Mr. Chris Forbes: I'm not sure there's a question there, but—

Hon. John McKay: There's not.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McKay.

You didn't fall off the cliff, by the way.

Now, Ms. Freeman, for five minutes.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

My questions are for Mr. Hallman. It's nice to see you again.

In Chapter 4, the commissioner found that it's unclear how projects are designated as being in need of an environmental evaluation. Specifically she said that there's a lack of clarity in the process and criteria, as well as the transparency.

Your response seems to accept the suggestion to document more. I guess that speaks to transparency. However, in terms of clarity of the criteria being used, are you going to take measures to clarify that process of designating the projects that specifically need environmental evaluation?

Mr. Ron Hallman: Mr. Chair, the commissioner has recommended that we develop criteria to recommend changes to the regulations. The act does provide some direction on that. The commissioner indicated that how we go about that is not necessarily clear for proponents and the public. We have accepted that. Of course, not everybody who doesn't work in this environment all the time will be able to look at the act and translate whether this will mean something for their project.

We have committed to providing clear language and making available on our website the types of considerations that go into whether a project ought to be designated or not.

• (1715)

Ms. Mylène Freeman: What kind of timeline are you looking at for making sure that these criteria are clarified to the public?

Mr. Ron Hallman: In our response, we haven't committed to a specific timeline yet.

The commissioner offered a number of recommendations, most of which relate to clarifying information, providing clear information, and making it public.

It's worth noting, as well, that this audit happened in a snapshot of 18 months after the coming into force of the act. We have guidance on certain topics on our website already, so we're going to go through those. We're going to see which ones respond to the recommendation and where the gaps are. Then we'll talk to people about what they think they need information on.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Yes, we appreciate the fact that the bill was rewritten, that the process has been rewritten, and that there are still things to be undertaken. But obviously, one of the things that the commissioner did raise as problematic with that is that the public feel as though they don't have confidence in that process. That's clearly problematic. Even if it's only for two years, people feeling like they don't have an effect on the environmental evaluation process is a concern. You certainly don't want to lose the confidence of the public when it comes to that, especially seeing that the commissioner raised the fact that aboriginals coming specifically from rural, remote communities, feel they have a limited capacity to engage. It means that the objective of the law isn't really being met, she essentially says. That's quite worrying. You agree that this is of top concern, I assume.

Mr. Ron Hallman: What I agree with, with respect to the recommendation, is that clear and available information about our processes is key to helping Canadians understand the act and how it applies. That gets to the heart of transparency, not only being aware of what the decisions are but how they are formulated and how the process works.

I feel a bit of disagreement with the assertion that Canadians don't have confidence. The commissioner indicated that transparency is important for maintaining confidence. In the objective review that I saw—specifically, I'll refer to chapter 4 rather than any other comments that might have since been made publicly—no evidence was ever presented to me that the public have no confidence or have limited confidence in the act.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Oh, no way.

The Chair: We'll move now to Mr. Woodworth for five minutes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There are three things I want to ask if I have time in five minutes. One is regarding the environmental assessment process.

My understanding is that in 2012 the Government of Canada expanded the project list that would require assessments. This is done under regulations under CEAA. Could someone clarify for me what types of projects were brought under the assessment requirement of CEAA through that regulation amendment in 2012 from the Government of Canada?

Ms. Helen Cutts (Vice-President, Policy Development Sector, Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency): I'd be happy to respond.

When we amended the project list, we brought in particular types of projects that we saw were having the greatest potential for significant adverse environmental effects. We made the decision based on consultation with the public. The types of areas that we brought in were diamond mines, the first exploratory drilling well offshore, railway yards, and international bridges and tunnels. These were all added to the list.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Was this when aggregate mines over a certain size were added also, or was that at a different time?

Ms. Helen Cutts: There was a change in the threshold for aggregates.

• (1720)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

My second question is really to ask for an answer to Ms. Ambler's question on hydrofluorocarbons. I don't want to try to restate the question, but if we could get the answer for Ms. Ambler, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Mike Beale: Mr. Chairman, the minister did in New York announce her intention to issue a notice of intent to regulate in the area of HFCs. That is important, in a sense, because of the relationship between the two environmental issues of climate change, on the one hand, and ozone depletion on the other hand. The committee members will be aware that the Montreal protocol is a very successful international agreement that addresses ozone depletion. The first key substance that was attacking the ozone layer was chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs. The Montreal protocol helped to reduce, and then phase out, CFCs. Then the world moved to HCFCs, a less potent type of destructor of the ozone layer, and that was quite successful. Then the world moved to HFCs. The good news about HFCs is that they don't destroy the ozone layer. The bad news is that they are a very potent greenhouse gas. So, in a sense, you were trading off one problem for another problem.

What Canada has been trying to do internationally is to work with the United States to get increased attention on the importance of stopping this trend towards the increased use of HFCs, which, if left unchecked, would lead to very significant greenhouse gas emissions and make climate change worse. What the minister announced in New York was the intent for Canada to bring forward a regulatory initiative that would be aligned with that of the United States to try to put a brake on the emissions of HFCs.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Very good. Thank you.

If I can, I will ask one quick last question regarding oil sands monitoring. I understand that a recommendation regarding annual reports being released on an established schedule resulted in agreement that there will be annual progress reports. Has a schedule been established? Can we count on those reports coming out more quickly than 15 months?

Dr. Karen Dodds (Assistant Deputy Minister, Science and Technology Branch, Department of the Environment): Indeed, with our colleagues in Alberta, we've agreed to a schedule going forward. For the second annual report, the first part of it should be

released tomorrow, and then the second part should be released later this fall.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

We'll move for the last five minutes to Mr. Bevington, please.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Forbes, on this forecast business that we've talked about a little bit, you said you didn't quite agree with the forecast that was made by the commissioner. Had your department created its own forecast prior to the commissioner's report on how you will achieve the goals of Copenhagen?

Mr. Chris Forbes: I may have misspoken. If I did, I apologize. What the commissioner uses is indeed our forecast in the charts Mr. McKay was referring to. What I was differing on was how those forecasts were being interpreted, what—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: So there is no other forecast?

Mr. Chris Forbes: There may be other forecasts, but I think what you'd find is that we have forecasts that are generally fairly widely accepted and thought of as fairly sound by people who follow these things.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay.

For the areas that the commissioner hasn't shown us any figures for, have you forecast what your regulations would likely achieve?

Mr. Chris Forbes: No, and I—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: So you don't know what the—

Mr. Chris Forbes: What I would say in answer to that—maybe I should have answered it differently—is it depends on what actions one takes, what the implications, the impacts, will be. Again, for a provincial action that may or may not happen. I could not be in the position now of estimating what that might look like.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: No, I was speaking specifically to the categories in which the commissioner reported that you were working but had no figures. Do you have figures for those categories of estimations of what those are going to do for...?

• (1725)

Mr. Chris Forbes: If regulations are being discussed, and they're not in a state to be published or out for consultation, we don't tend to have a very precise number for them. Obviously, we think about what the impacts might be, because that's an important piece, but we don't have numbers on those.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Is there any information you can give us about what your forecast is, for the areas you're working in?

Mr. Chris Forbes: No, I don't think so, because those would be issues that are under discussion. They're either not fully developed or, if they were further developed, they would be issues that would be under discussion for cabinet consideration.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: So you're not willing to share that information?

Mr. Chris Forbes: Well, I either don't have it or I'm not able to. I'm not sure it has to do with my willingness.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Hallman, on this question of which projects should be undergoing environmental assessment, recently we've seen in the in situ oil fields in Alberta some real serious environmental issues showing up with leakage. Has it changed the department's view about whether we should be doing environmental assessments of these projects, when we see that obviously we have problems that weren't anticipated in the development of these projects?

Mr. Ron Hallman: I'll stay away from the policy-related aspect of your question, but what I can say is that—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Are you reassessing the project? Are you reassessing the in situ oil projects in Alberta to determine whether they need environmental assessment after the problems that have shown up in the Cold Lake field?

Mr. Ron Hallman: If the question is, "is the project list contemplated for changes at this time?", the answer is no.

If I could speak about the project list just briefly, the project list has types of projects that are generally understood to have the greatest likelihood for significant adverse environmental effects. Then, one might reasonably ask, what if we didn't get it right? What if the project list isn't right?

What if there are some things on the project list where a reasonable understanding would be that there won't be adverse

effects or that the effects will be negligible and can be managed through permitting or another jurisdiction? Well, there is a provision in the act that allows the agency to screen those projects out, so that we aren't expending resources and time and putting proponents through that work if it's not really necessary.

On the other side of the fence, one might say, well, what if there is a project for which there is not a designation in the project list, but really the evidence becomes overwhelming that there is the potential for significant adverse environmental effects? There is a measure in the act that allows the minister in those cases to designate that project —

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay, but—

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Bevington. We've run out of time.

I think we've had a great run and were able to get a lot of information from our commissioner and our officials from the department.

I want to thank all of you as witnesses for being with us today.

Thanks to our committee members.

The meeting is adjourned.

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