



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 006

Wednesday, November 18, 2020

Chair: Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia



Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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• (1610)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Alexandre Roger): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

I must inform the members that during the election of the chair, the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, cannot entertain points of order, nor participate in debate.

We can now proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party. I am now ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): I would like to nominate Mr. Scarpaleggia for chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Yvan Baker that Mr. Scarpaleggia be elected chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Seeing no other motions, I declare Mr. Scarpaleggia duly elected chair of the committee.

Congratulations, you may now take the chair, sir.

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Just as a point of clarification, do we have to vote on it or is it just a motion and that's the end of it?

The Clerk: Because there was only one nomination, it was by acclamation.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Wonderful. Congratulations, Francis.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Before the chair gets to rule me out of order, I want to congratulate him as well. I've known Francis Scarpaleggia for many years. This is a very appropriate choice for your chair.

Thank you, members of the committee.

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Thank you, Ms. May. That's very kind of you. Indeed, we have worked together for a long time, and it's been a great honour for me.

First of all, thank you to everyone for your confidence.

[Translation]

Thank you so much for your confidence.

It will be a great pleasure to work together to advance environmental issues.

[English]

We're at meeting number six, and the committee is meeting today for a briefing by the Auditor General of Canada and the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of September 23, 2020. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. Members may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French. There are three channels.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in the committee room. Keep in mind the directives from the Board of Internal Economy regarding masking and health protocols.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. I think that's pretty standard practice. If you are on video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. Those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer. As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, please put your mike on mute.

With regard to the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking from members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. We have, from the Office of the Auditor General, Karen Hogan, Auditor General of Canada; Andrew Hayes, deputy auditor general and interim commissioner of the environment and sustainable development; Kimberley Leach, principal; and James McKenzie, principal.

My understanding is, Mr. Clerk, that we have five minutes for opening statements. That would include all witnesses. We'll try to follow that rule and see how it goes.

I imagine Ms. Hogan will be going first.

Ms. Karen Hogan (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations on your recent nomination to the chair of this very important committee.

[*Translation*]

We prepared some slides and submitted them to the committee in preparation for our appearance today. I encourage you to keep them as reference tools for my office's mandate.

To maximize the time for questions from the committee, Mr. Hayes and I will cover only the highlights of our presentation.

I will start by discussing the activities of our office, which are presented on slides 8 to 11. More than half of our financial auditors are involved in annual audits of financial statements of the Government of Canada and the three territories. This also includes annual audits of several Crown corporations. In these audits, we express an opinion on the financial position on the basis of accounting standards.

We also perform special examinations, which are actually performance audits, but within a Crown corporation. The law requires a special examination at least once every 10 years in all parent Crown corporations.

• (1615)

[*English*]

The audits that Parliament is most familiar with are performance audits. These audits look at whether government programs are managed with due regard to economy, efficiency and the environment. We also look at whether there are measures in place to determine if programs are effective. This is commonly referred to as auditing the four Es.

We may comment on policy implementation in our performance audit, but we will not comment on policy itself.

The commissioner of the environment and sustainable development assists me in the areas of my mandate when they relate to the environment and sustainable development. All of our performance audit work, whether it is issued under the banner of the Auditor General or the commissioner of the environment, follows the same planning, execution and selection processes, and we have the same standards for quality.

Many of our performance auditors enjoy the mobility of working on any one of our performance audit products.

I'll now hand it over to Andrew, the interim commissioner of the environment and sustainable development. He can discuss some of the other work we do with respect to sustainable development strategies and the petitions process.

Mr. Andrew Hayes (Deputy Auditor General and Interim Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Office of the Auditor General): Thank you very much.

I am pleased to be here today. As Ms. Hogan mentioned, my role is to support her in the work she has to do for her mandate that relates to environment and sustainable development.

Each year I have the privilege of submitting an annual report for tabling with Parliament. In that annual report there will be a commentary on the petitions process, which is a process that is available for residents of Canada to ask questions about environmental matters and sustainable development and to receive a response directly from a minister. To date, between 26 and 27 departments and agencies have been subject to the petitions process. In the future, at the beginning of December, that will become almost 100 because of the amendments to the Federal Sustainable Development Act last year.

In my annual report, I also have to comment on sustainable development strategies and the progress that departments and agencies have made in support of the federal sustainable development strategies, goals and targets. In terms of the scope of that work, it was at one point 26 or 27 departments and agencies. At the beginning of December, that's going to rise to about 100.

You will also see in my annual report audit reports that look very similar to the ones that are presented by the Auditor General periodically. From time to time, we can have one or two in the annual report, but we've also been privileged in the past to be able to table a separate report taking one of the Auditor General's periodic reports for the purposes of tabling environmental and sustainable development audits.

As a final point, I would mention that, in terms of my mandate, over the 25 years of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development we have seen many audits of environmental matters. Over the last few years, building on the work of our previous commissioner, Julie Gelfand, we have been expanding the work in the area of sustainable development. In particular, the sustainable development goals from the United Nations have provided us with an absolutely incredible lens through which to look at the activities and progress that government makes in those areas.

With that, I might leave the slides because you do have some information there about our priorities and our upcoming audits, which I suspect might be better covered during questions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentations.

We now proceed to the first round of questions and answers, where everyone has the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Kusie, you have the floor.

• (1620)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the senior Conservative on the committee, Dan Albas, for giving me the opportunity to be here today.

My thanks to the witnesses as well.

[English]

The questions I'll be asking today are relevant to report 1. I will also indicate that this information was communicated in a letter to the chair of the committee of which I am vice-chair, the transportation committee, so this information is specific relative to report 1 and that letter.

My first question for the Auditor General and her team is on this. Within the follow-up audit, you examined a sample of 60 violations in fiscal year 2018-19 and found that in 18 of those 60 violations Transport Canada could not verify "that companies took corrective actions" in an effort "to return to compliance". This is a result of three possible scenarios.

Number one is that Transport Canada "did not follow up with companies to obtain the required evidence." Situation number two is that they "did not conclude whether violations were resolved, despite companies having submitted the required evidence that they took corrective actions to address the violations." Situation number three is the conclusion "that companies had returned to compliance". However, the documentation was not received in an effort "to support that conclusion", a very important part of an audit, as always.

Within the first two situations, where there was no follow-up or no conclusion, was it that the department did not have an adequate system in place to follow up on those violations, or was there a system in place that was not being applied?

My second question, relevant to my first question, is this: What information was the department using to conclude that companies were returning to compliance?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Thank you very much for the question.

In our report, we noted that the Department of Transport had established a risk-based system for identifying the inspections it would do; however, we also found that the information upon which it based its decisions was not always accurate and valid.

In terms of the examples you raised and the violations, ultimately I would say that we found that the department wasn't following up on the incidents of violations that had been identified in previous reviews by the department.

I will ask my colleague Kim Leach to give a bit more detail, but what I would say is that, in terms of the situations where there was no evidence that violations had been resolved, or where the department had reached a conclusion that they were resolved without information, that is a fundamental level of failure to keep and monitor the documentation.

Kim, would you like to add to that at all?

Ms. Kimberley Leach (Principal, Office of the Auditor General): Certainly, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Andrew.

Thank you for the question. You're referring to paragraph 1.30 in report 1 that we tabled on October 27, of course.

Clearly, the evidence showed that of 60 violations, in 18 of them in our sample, the companies were not returned to corrective action.

Part of the issue—and you pointed out the several instances in which—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Ms. Leach. If you don't mind, I think I'll move on to my next question. I feel that you are repeating some of the facts, and I do have other questions to ask.

Thank you.

Ms. Kimberley Leach: There was nothing in the file is the answer.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Super. Thank you.

My next question for our witnesses is that it was also found in the audit that Transport Canada "did not routinely collect data from provinces and territories, which share responsibility with Transport Canada for monitoring compliance for the transportation of dangerous goods by road". Why did this occur? Why was this data from provinces and territories not routinely collected?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: The answer to that question is that there are agreements in place with the provinces and one of the territories. It is for Transport Canada, in our view, to follow up with those provinces and territories to collect the information. The reasons for not following up would be best answered by the department. In our view, they have the tools to be able to collect that information.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Okay, so they do have the tools. Thank you.

I just have a minute left, so I'll go to my last question.

I think most relevant and pertinent to this committee I'm at today is Transport Canada's performance of meeting goal three of the United Nations sustainable development goals, specifically target 3.9, which is, "By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination".

The department was not meeting its target of 2%. In fact, there was even an increase.

How has the department determined that they will now work towards meeting these targets, and why wasn't Transport Canada able to meet these targets?

• (1625)

Mr. Andrew Hayes: We did identify in the report that there had been a change to the way that they evaluated and included instances in their list of the rate of reporting dangerous goods releases. Nevertheless, they still did not meet the target. I believe that the department is aware and has committed to taking action to reduce that.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Schiefke, you have the floor.

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

I thank the witnesses for being with us today.

I will start by addressing the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

One of the Commissioner's priorities is to assess the risks associated with climate change. More specifically, future work will take financial aspects into account, as well as emerging adaptation and mitigation initiatives.

This is a priority shared by my constituents in Vaudreuil—Soulanges. We have experienced two historic floods since 2017, and the issues of risk mitigation are critical.

Could the commissioner explain how these factors are included in the audits?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Thank you for the question.

We conducted climate change audits in 2017, and issued a collaborative report with several provinces in 2018. We also conducted audits in the territories. Relevant climate change topics are very high on our list of priorities for future audits. We will be drafting a report and doing some climate change audits in 2022.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you.

[English]

The next question I have is with regard to international co-operation.

In the presentation we received, it's noted that the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development works with auditors in numerous other countries around the world to assess preparedness and implementation for the 2030 SDG agenda. Achieving the SDGs is an incredibly important component for ensuring a fair and more sustainable world. That's something I agree wholeheartedly with and something that's been shared with me by many of my constituents in Vaudreuil—Soulanges.

Could the commissioner please provide more details about the role of implementing the SDGs and the recent international work with regard to preparedness?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Thank you very much.

I will ask Ms. Leach to expand on this, because Ms. Leach and our former commissioner, Julie Gelfand, had been leading work together to support the development of auditing on the topic of the SDGs. Honestly, I would say Canada is a leader in that respect because of the work that Ms. Leach and Ms. Gelfand have done on that.

Ms. Leach, would you like to add to that?

Ms. Kimberley Leach: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Hayes and Mr. Chair.

In 2016, our International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions—that's the organization to which all auditors general in the world belong—developed a strategic plan that said all supreme audit institutions should help the UN monitor and assess and measure the progress towards sustainable development goals.

In fact, we've been doing this since 2016. We've done two government-wide audits. We're presently in the middle of a government-wide audit that's looking at the implementation of the SDGs, which will be tabled in the spring.

In 2018, we tabled an audit that looked at the preparedness of our government to implement the sustainable development goals. We looked at seven things. The results of that audit were not good. We have been to this committee to speak to that audit in the past. We are currently doing a government-wide audit on this that will look at the extent to which our recommendations from 2018 have been implemented and how government is doing on implementation.

The other thing that we do is that all audits in our office, all performance audits, whether they're related to health or defence—it's not just environmental audits but all audits—need to take the sustainable development goals into account in the work that they do. We're quite proud of that.

• (1630)

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Maybe I'll just add that the work that Ms. Leach and Ms. Gelfand have done has allowed other international auditors general to be prepared to audit the SDGs, and also we've provided them with advice and criteria that they can use.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Okay.

Similarly, some previous reports from the Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development have focused primarily on two environmental issues. However, sustainable development encompasses much more than just the environment. It also includes social, economic and traditional considerations. I'd like to know what is being done to include those factors in the assessment reports of the commissioner and the Auditor General.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Andrew Hayes: We always work with audit teams within the office to ensure that sustainable development objectives are considered a priority when planning and selecting our audits for the commissioner and the Auditor General.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now give the floor to Ms. Pauzé.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Good afternoon.

Thank you for being here.

This is very interesting.

I know that you often have to deal with requests, delays and perhaps a lack of power. As we look at the Auditor General's report on progress made by departments and agencies in implementing sustainable development strategies, we see, on page 7 of the French version, that two of the 10 contributing actions related to air quality were not addressed.

According to Health Canada reports, air pollution causes several thousand deaths each year.

Can you tell us whether more attention should be paid to the connection between health and the environment and whether you should insist that this be done?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: In our report, we found that targets and measures were not included in departmental reports. Twelve departments were included in our audit and we found shortcomings with respect to the measures.

It's important that all priorities be included in the reports so that Canadians and parliamentarians can get a true picture of our government's progress and actions.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Yes. We agree that much work remains to be done.

On page 12 of the document you sent us, you state that criteria that are helpful in leading to successful audits include the engagement with stakeholders. So you select reports based on that. In 2019, Environment Canada's report failed to provide a complete list of non-tax fossil fuel subsidies required for auditing. Only grants for 23 out of 200 organizations could be identified.

Is it time for the commissioner to have broader powers to carry out audits?

• (1635)

Mr. Andrew Hayes: That is a political matter. In my opinion, it is our role to conduct audits and make recommendations. In doing that work, we provide information to Parliament. It is a role that this committee and others could play to influence progress.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Everyone must do their part, as they say. However, in the case of Transport Canada, which was mentioned earlier in connection with fossil fuel subsidies, no one seems willing to do their part. I find that unfortunate.

Mr. Andrew Hayes: That happens in a few instances. For example, it happens in some cases related to biodiversity. In my view, it's important for departments and agencies to engage with a high degree of confidence on the issues that fall within their mandates.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: You say that members of Parliament can do something, but we really need those tools and those numbers.

For example, when Ms. Gelfand tabled her last report, she said the government needed to tighten up the definition of the word "ineffective" when talking about fossil fuel subsidies because it was unclear. Fossil fuel subsidies were not being reduced or stabilized, they were increasing.

Out of respect for the institutions you represent, could we not consider enhanced monitoring measures? Isn't it time to demand answers?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I will give you an example.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts uses reports and requests action plans from departments. It's a good practice because it forces them to set timelines. It also provides an opportunity for the committee to follow up.

Our office does monitoring reports from time to time, but it has not been a high priority over the past decade because of the other issues we had to look at.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: What I'm reading gives me the impression that departments do not work together. My other question will be about that.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have about 10 seconds left. Perhaps Mr. Hayes can answer in the second round of questions.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: That is exactly what we will do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Collins, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses today.

If we look at the past four years, from 2016 through 2019, we see that the environment commissioner's office was averaging almost five environmental audits—4.75—each year. Now, in 2020, we have one environmental audit report. We have only two planned for 2021. I'm not including in these numbers the required departmental reports on the SDGs or the annual reports on petitions. I'm not including the natural health products, which doesn't seem to be an environmental audit. I'm just talking about actual environmental auditing work.

It seems like we're doing way less than we used to do, and it seems particularly alarming, given the climate crisis we're facing, the biodiversity crisis and the threats to fresh water, to the environment and to human health.

I'm curious about your plans for strengthening the office of the commissioner of the environment to allow this office to do the important environmental audit work that Parliament and Canadians have come to rely on.

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I would say that your question raises two important points. The first relates to the audit work that we have done historically. I would say that for the large majority of the mandate of the commissioner since 1995, the environmental audits have been the focal point. I think that over the last number of years we have done more sustainable development audits than we have in the prior years.

The mandate that we do have relates to both the environment and sustainable development, so we have tried to find that balance.

The other angle that your question raises is one that relates directly to our financing, our funding, as the Office of the Auditor General. As Ms. Hogan mentioned in her opening remarks, the work that is done for the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development is part of our performance audit practice. It's the same practice in our office that supports the work of the Auditor General. Because of our funding and resourcing challenges, we have had to reduce our performance audit practices work over the years.

• (1640)

Ms. Laurel Collins: Mr. Hayes, I'm going to interrupt you. It sounds like you are under-resourced and need more funding to do the important environmental auditing work that Canadians rely on.

I have another question for you, Ms. Hogan. The interim commissioner was appointed in July 2019, well over a year ago. It's good to hear that you'll finally be starting the selection process by November 30. I'm curious to know who you're consulting on this. Specifically, have you met with leaders from any of Canada's environmental organizations?

Ms. Karen Hogan: You are correct. We launched a countrywide search for the new commissioner of the environment and sustainable development at the end of October. What we have done so far to find—

Ms. Laurel Collins: I'm sorry. I have very limited time. Have you met with leaders of any of Canada's environmental organizations?

Ms. Karen Hogan: I personally have not yet. They have communicated with me, and we are reaching out through our professional networks to make sure that people know we're searching.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you, Ms. Hogan. If you haven't met with any of these leaders from Canada's environmental movements, I'm worried that the Office of the Auditor General doesn't have the expertise it needs to support the commissioner of the environment to do the important and specialized work of environmental audits.

I understand that there is a specialized group, called the commissioner's group, in the environment commissioner's office. Can you tell me about the status of the commissioner's group right now? How many people are on it, and what are their roles?

Ms. Karen Hogan: As I mentioned earlier, while we do have a group that we call the commissioner's group, it is more of an administrative function because of who they report to within our organization's structure. Our performance audit practice has specialists from all fields.

Ms. Laurel Collins: For sure. I'm just particularly concerned and wondering about the commissioner's group right now. How many people are on it, and what are their roles?

Ms. Karen Hogan: I couldn't really tell you how many people are on a particular team, because as I said, we don't have people who are designated within a group. We have auditors who spend a good amount of their time working on performance audits that are issued under the banner of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, but it's not a group. We are one happy family of auditors. It's just that some have specialties and spend a lot more time helping with the environment work—

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you so much. I have such limited time, and I want to get to all of my questions.

From what you're saying, it sounds like this group doesn't totally exist anymore, and from what I've heard, the group did exist. From what you're describing, it sounds like in some ways this group may have been abolished.

Ms. Karen Hogan: No, not at all, the group was not abolished. What we're doing is that we're taking the skills and specialties of people like Ms. Leach and Mr. McKenzie, who are here today, and spreading them out across our work. When we want to have sustainable development goals addressed in all of our work—

Ms. Laurel Collins: I understand that there's a lot of work going on, but Parliament has explicitly recognized that we are also facing

a national environmental emergency and that this kind of environmental auditing is very important. I think by the logic that it needs to be more integrated, if you were to merge Environment Canada with NRCan, you'd risk subordinating environmental concerns to economic ones. It's concerning to hear that this group is no longer existing as it used to.

The Chair: Time is up, unfortunately.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The witnesses can always come back and provide answers and comments to previously asked questions.

We'll go to the second round now, with questions of five minutes and two and a half minutes.

We'll start with Mr. Jeneroux.

• (1645)

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations to you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Hayes and Ms. Hogan, I'd like to thank you and your teams for joining us here today.

Mr. Hayes, were you recently consulted on the government's announcement of plastic toxicity labelling?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: No, I wasn't.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Were you consulted on the clean fuel standards?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: No, we weren't. I will maybe say that our role as an auditor can involve being consulted up front, but that's really the prerogative of the department. We can and do sometimes look into design when we know about things in advance.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Great. Thank you.

It says here that, as part of your mandate, the commissioner provides parliamentarians with “analysis and recommendations on the federal government's efforts to protect the environment and foster sustainable development”. Do you think it would have been helpful to have conversations with you ahead of time?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I'll use as an example the consultation that was built into the Federal Sustainable Development Act and the federal sustainable development strategy. We did provide advice when consulted before that was put into place. Also, I believe our recommendations were of value to the government when they did receive them.

We are an information point. We are a place that would like to be helpful early on as well as in the work we do after.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: That sounds like a long “yes”, Mr. Commissioner.

I agree. I think it would be helpful to consult you in advance of some of these announcements.

Would you agree that it's vital to be able to properly assess targets and priorities in order to know whether government policies are in fact producing results that will protect the environment?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I do agree that it is important to assess targets and performance measures. What you measure is going to drive what you achieve, so it is important to know you have the right measures and targets in place early on, before it's too late.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Has the government acknowledged the issues you've outlined in your report?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: In general for the commissioner's reports, we've had agreement on the facts and the presentation of the information in the reports and to the recommendations. Typically, the departments respond with actions they will take in response to our recommendations.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Have they then demonstrated a willingness to amend the draft in order to properly assess all government priorities and targets to ensure transparency?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I'm not sure I could say, on a blanket level like that, that we've received that sort of reaction. However, I do believe that, in response to our recommendations, there have typically been agreement and efforts to respond.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, that's all the questions I have.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you.

It's great to see you, Ms. Hogan and Mr. Hayes.

We're in the environment committee. Most of the time we see each other in public accounts. Thank you for all the time you're spending with all of our committees to inform us about your great work. I look forward to talking to you tomorrow about the defence audit that was done.

I read through report 2. It was good to see how you are integrating the sustainable development goals from the United Nations—the sustainable development goal 3 of good health and well-being. Of course, environment and sustainable goals are important, as are economic, but social goals are also extremely important in terms of sustainability.

I wonder if you could comment, Mr. Hayes or Ms. Hogan, on how the federal sustainable development strategy is getting integrated into your work across departments.

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I'll start with that.

The federal sustainable development strategy provides a number of commitments and targets that we use, from time to time, as criteria for our work.

I mentioned earlier the sustainable development goals. Those are being used broadly across the office, not just in our performance audit practice but also in our special examination work of Crown

corporations. We are looking for the places where we can use the sustainable development goals to analyze what's going on in Crown corporations and government departments.

You can expect to see mention of the sustainable development goals on a very regular basis in most of our products.

• (1650)

Ms. Karen Hogan: If I could just add, Mr. Longfield, we are already incorporating the sustainable development goals into our work, but we can and we should be doing a better job. That is exactly our goal.

Regardless of how we decide to structure or set ourselves up to manage our people, it doesn't mean we're taking away the importance of them. In fact, we're expanding the scope and knowledge of them, thus increasing the importance of sustainable development goals within our work.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great.

As I read the recommendations, the 12 departments that were audited were in agreement that they are also trying to get up to speed. I don't think it was a gotcha moment. It is more that we are transitioning the way we operate as a government and focusing on sustainability for all the goals that we're working together on. Would that be a fair assessment?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I think that, in response to the recommendations, the departments did agree. What was probably most important for me was the agreement that comprehensive reporting and integration of all of the targets and measures should happen so that nothing is missed.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: In terms of the integration within the Office of the Auditor General, and the skill sets that are transferred between and even within audits, could you talk about how this is evolving over time?

Where do you see the Office of the Auditor General and the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development working together or working separately?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I'll start with this and then I'll turn it over to Ms. Hogan.

It's important to recognize that a policy decision was made very early on with the way the act was set up, so that the commissioner is not a stand-alone office. The commissioner supports the Office of the Auditor General, and there has been discussion over the years about whether or not a commissioner should be a stand-alone commissioner.

The way we're structured, the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development is a senior officer appointed by the Auditor General to assist her with her mandate. It should be noted that the mandate belongs to the Auditor General. The commissioner assists her.

Ms. Karen Hogan: When it comes to the kind of expertise we have within the office, we have CPAs, lawyers, economists, environmentalists, engineers, so many. We do have a pocket of rich experience and knowledge about the environment and sustainable development area, and we're trying to make sure that we broaden and expand it. When we feel we don't have that expertise, we hire it to support us in the audits we do.

Right now with our funding pressures, as we said earlier, we did have to make choices to narrow all our discretionary work, which impacted both audits issued under the Auditor General's banner and those under the commissioner of the environment. They both were impacted by some of our pressures.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Longfield. We're right on five minutes unfortunately, but we'll get back to you shortly.

[Translation]

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is a known fact that Employment and Social Development Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada significantly coordinate, and even harmonize, their efforts. Why is the issue of sustainable development divided between two departments? Would it not have been simpler to have a single department handle it, let's say Environment and Climate Change Canada?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I made that point in 2019. In my view, coordination issues come up when two departments are trying to do the same thing. Environment and Climate Change Canada has a group working on the federal sustainable development strategy. A group at Employment and Social Development Canada is working on strategies to address sustainable development objectives. Dividing things like that causes confusion. In my opinion—

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I will stop you there, because I only have two and a half minutes.

I saw that you noticed that lack of coordination. Who can fix this? Because you have the experts, as I understand it.

• (1655)

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I would say that it would be more effective if a central agency was responsible for working on sustainable development objectives. This is because those departments do not have the authority in their mandate to influence or direct other departments.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Because it's your role, you have access to other departments. Isn't that right?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Yes, we have access to all departments.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Is the harmonization plan Ms. Hogan mentioned earlier being developed? Where are we in that process?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds for your answer.

Ms. Karen Hogan: Are you talking about harmonization in our office?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'm talking about the harmonization between the two departments working on the environment, Environ-

ment and Climate Change Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada.

Ms. Karen Hogan: I don't know.

Mr. Hayes, could you answer the question?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I can only say that both departments are aware of the links between the federal strategies and sustainable development objectives, but I believe there is some confusion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hayes.

Ms. Collins, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to follow up on the question, this time to Mr. Hayes, about the commissioner's group. I know you were hired in July and the former environment commissioner didn't leave until September. My understanding is that, under the previous environment commissioner, the commissioner's group was an actual group.

Can you describe to me the status of that group right now and how it's changed since then?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I'll go back to 2015 because that's when I started supporting the commissioner with audits as a principal. There were three leaders of the performance audit practice at that time. Two assistant auditors general and the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development led the performance audit practice together.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Please be very concise just about the commissioner's group.

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I'm trying to suggest that the commissioner was a partner with two other assistant auditors general in managing the performance audit practice.

Ms. Laurel Collins: I'm curious about staff. We talked a little bit about structure. The Auditor General talked about expanding the scope and mandate. I'm really curious about the need for specific specialized scientific, technological, economic and policy skills. I've seen recent job postings from the Office of the Auditor General explicitly seeking candidates with expertise including IT and economics.

In contrast, there does not appear to be any explicit job postings seeking the recruitment of environmental experts for several years. Are there plans to hire more environmental experts?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I would say that there are. At this point we are hoping and confident that we will receive additional funding. This is something for which we have received support from Parliament.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you. I just have 30 seconds left.

I just want to note that over the past years, as the environment commissioner mentioned, MPs of all stripes have noted their appreciation for the role of the commissioner. David McGuinty put forward a motion asking the government to make the commissioner a full and independent agent of Parliament.

I have submitted a notice of motion and, at the time, Mr. Scarpa-leggia, our chair, actually supported this motion. It's the same one David McGuinty put forward. I'm hoping that I will find support once folks have a chance to read it over.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Collins.

We'll go to Mr. Redekopp for five minutes please.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): I believe Mr. Godin is going to go first and then I'll take the last round.

The Chair: I'm sorry. It got reversed from the order I was given originally.

Mr. Godin, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to congratulate you and I invite you to learn my name by heart.

Madam Auditor General and Mr. Interim Commissioner, thank you for your assistance.

Ms. Hogan, you mentioned in your opening remarks that departmental sustainable development strategies will be assessed for implementation and progress. You stated that 70 federal organizations are currently under the microscope. In 43 days, including weekends and holidays, you will have 30 more. Can you explain what will happen in those 43 days to add another 30 agencies?

• (1700)

Ms. Karen Hogan: I just want to make sure I understand your question. You are asking what we are going to do to enable us to audit a greater number of agencies. Is that right?

Mr. Joël Godin: You stated that, to date, 70 federal agencies are under the microscope. In December 2020, that number will be close to 100 agencies. My question is, what is going to happen in the next 43 days to enable you to reach your goal of 100 agencies?

Ms. Karen Hogan: When mandates are laid out in the law, we organize ourselves to be able to fulfill our commitments. This is what you are seeing when our organization reduces the number of performance audits. All our office's financial work is required by law. We make sure we fulfill our mandate, which is non-discretionary. So we are going to organize ourselves the same way we have in the past.

Mr. Joël Godin: For my personal information and that of committee members, how many federal agencies are there in total? Because 100 may be a lot, or it may not be. If there are 5,000, looking at 100 is not very effective.

Ms. Karen Hogan: There are about 100 departments and agencies, 101, I believe. They would all be subject to assessments.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand, thank you.

My second question is this: you stated in this fall's Report 2 that it is "difficult for parliamentarians and Canadians to gain a clear sense of overall progress against the goal." I agree with your comment and I have reached the same conclusion. The agencies have failed to mention key aspects of what they intended to accomplish as a performance target.

The current government has been in place for five years and we have no way to assess what it has done, or to know where it is going. It's like they have good intentions, but they don't have any measures or a specific plan to achieve their goals.

What advice would you give us so that, as parliamentarians, we can request performance assessment tools?

Ms. Karen Hogan: Do you mean tools in general, or tools related to sustainable development in particular?

Mr. Hayes might want to answer that question.

Mr. Joël Godin: I am talking about sustainable development. That's what I see in Report 2: Departmental Progress in Implementing Sustainable Development Strategies.

Yes, Mr. Hayes should answer, actually.

Mr. Andrew Hayes: The action plans I mentioned are good tools for the committee. The former Auditor General often made that comment, and we will likely make it in the future as well. The quality of departmental information is important, because it helps us provide good reports and advice to Parliament, and it also enables you to follow up with departments.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Hayes, you stated that there will be no climate change report before 2022. I feel that, if we believe climate change is important and we are making it a priority, we should be doing studies to see if we are headed for disaster, or if we are introducing measures that have positive impacts and that are intended to reduce our environmental footprint and our greenhouse gases?

The government has been in power for five years and will have governed for eight years by 2022. Let's hope for its sake that we will not have an election before then, or that it will win the next election—although that's not what I want. By that time, the government will have been in power for eight years. You're talking about waiting until 2022 to assess what is being done about climate change.

Wouldn't it be better to implement performance measures to find out what is happening right now and monitor things so we can react?

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time is up, Mr. Godin. We can come back to your question later.

• (1705)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I have asked my question. Could I get a short answer from the commissioner?

The Chair: Unfortunately, no, because you took five and a half minutes. Your turn will come up again in a few minutes, and Mr. Hayes can respond.

Mr. Saini, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and congratulations again on your selection as the chair of this committee.

I want to thank Mr. Hayes and Ms. Hogan and the rest of the team for coming here today.

One of the themes that has emerged through this meeting has been the sustainable development goals. I would like to focus on one because this one I think checks off a lot of boxes that would be very effective in helping the government and the country meet their climate goals. Of particular interest to me is goal 12.3, which deals with food loss and waste and calls on nations to commit to reducing their food waste by 50% by 2030.

I know that you are going to be doing a report mid next year looking at the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. Are you currently thinking about this area at all? Is this an interest of the auditor, to look at this aspect of the sustainable development goals?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I would say that, yes, it is an area of interest for us. The audit that we are planning to report in spring 2021 is about the implementation of the sustainable development goals.

I might pass it over to Kim Leach, who is the principal responsible for that audit, to maybe expand on that.

Ms. Kimberley Leach: Very quickly on that subject, we are doing an audit on protecting Canada's food supply. That will be part of our suite of COVID audits and is targeted for tabling in the fall of 2021. In that audit we are looking at the sustainable development goals and the targets you have referred to.

Mr. Raj Saini: The other follow-up question I have is this. If you are going to be doing that, are you collecting data and how are you collecting that data?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Kim, would you like to take that?

Ms. Kimberley Leach: Sure.

In the food supply audit, we have identified five different programs that the government has implemented as a result of the pandemic suite of spending. We're looking at the extent to which those programs...how they are designed, how they are delivering their programs, the results of these programs and whether they are achieving their results. For example, some of them are designed to get food to vulnerable populations, so we're looking at the extent to which.... We're talking with StatsCan, which collects information on food supply and its supply to vulnerable populations. They have disaggregated data to some extent.

Yes, we are looking at various aspects of the food supply system.

Mr. Raj Saini: Going forward, you said you are going to be looking at five areas, basically. As we get closer to 2030 there are going to be certain areas where we are ahead and there might be certain areas where we're facing challenges.

Will you be doing further audits on specific SDGs, or will these audits always be on the broader thematic of SDGs?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: As we mentioned, we are incorporating the SDGs and the targets that are supporting them in our audits across

the office, so we will most likely be including many SDGs that are doing well and many SDGs that may be in need of improvement in our country.

Mr. Raj Saini: One of the things that has emerged at the United Nations in terms of food loss is to be setting standards where things can be measured, either food loss indexes or food waste indexes.

I am wondering, is there any thought to.... I'm thankful you're doing the audit because I think this is a topic that could really be helpful in multiple areas of our society, but is there any way you are thinking about developing a standard that can be measured going forward?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: That would be the responsibility of the departments. We would evaluate how they set those standards and whether or not they took into consideration all of the relevant factors in reaching their decisions.

Mr. Raj Saini: Do you think that's a good idea, to have a standard, so there can be a possible measurement as you're accumulating data? One of the problems in this area is that data collection is very weak, not necessarily in Canada but worldwide. There is a very difficult way of quantifying exactly how much food is wasted and how much is lost.

Would you recommend that the government come up with standards and a way of collecting that data to make sure we have some parameters to measure by?

• (1710)

Mr. Andrew Hayes: We are always in favour of supporting better measures and better methods to collect information to be able to measure progress. It becomes very difficult to report on progress achieved when the measures or the targets that are set are not specific, measurable, attainable, results-based or time-oriented. We do encourage departments and agencies to set standards.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you to the witnesses for coming today.

Congratulations to the new chair.

I want to follow up on Mr. Godin's last question.

Mr. Hayes, could you please provide a written response to his question, as we ran out of time to get the answer? If you could provide that to the committee, that would be great.

Mr. Andrew Hayes: We'd be happy to.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you.

Auditor General, I'd like to ask you a question about program auditing.

My background is in business, and I was a professional accountant. Of course I was used to preparing and auditing financial statements in a business environment. Program auditing is obviously different, as you're looking at more than just money. You're looking at the effectiveness of programming, etc.

In the estimates there are many cross-departmental programs or horizontal items. Basically, Finance Canada and the Treasury Board earmark money to one department, like Environment Canada, for example, for planting trees, and then the environment department transfers that money to Natural Resources to deliver the program. It's basically a financial shell game that allows ministers to abandon responsibility for money and programming in their departments.

Two weeks ago at this committee Minister Wilkinson said, "As you will know, most of the tree-planting activity [is] a natural resources-related function". The minister's mandate letter from the Prime Minister says that the Minister of the Environment is "to operationalize the plan to plant two billion incremental trees over the next 10 years".

When ministers such as Minister Wilkinson refuse to take responsibility for programs they are mandated with and responsible for under the voted estimates, do you find, from a program auditing perspective, that these types of programs are destined to fail?

Ms. Karen Hogan: The government is definitely moving in a direction where there is a lot of cross-organizational push for programs to be delivered in such a fashion. I think the challenge from an audit perspective is that this just adds some complexities, as you can likely appreciate, to an audit. Personally, I don't believe that it would result in a program failure. It just means that it takes more coordination and collaboration amongst parties, and when it comes time to audit, it means we need to scope in additional departments and make sure that our roles and responsibilities are clear and that accountability is there.

I just see it as an opportunity, and it's an area that I would like to see us focus in on. Our audits need to be aligned with how the government organizes itself to deliver programs, so I would like to see us spend a little more time doing that, as well as perhaps doing some collaborative work between ourselves and the territories so that we can see the federal-provincial-territorial link to some programs. It's definitely something that's on my horizon during my mandate.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Yes, I can understand how that would make life much more difficult for you.

Does it frustrate you, as the Auditor General, when the Liberals make promises—for example, to better our environment—when they clearly don't have a plan to properly measure, monitor and report on these programs?

Ms. Karen Hogan: As we've mentioned, it's always a good recommendation to make sure that, when you launch a program, you've thought about how you're going to measure its successes. When we see that missing in a program design, we take the opportunity to recommend that. You achieve what you measure, so every good plan should have some good performance indicators and good measurements to make sure that you know when you're achieving your intended result.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you.

This is for the environment commissioner.

You appeared at this committee in March and reported that the government is "not adequately prepared" for some of its commitments on the environment. In particular, I believe you said that it had "no implementation plan with a system to measure, monitor and report on progress nationally." The government announced new targets in September's throne speech for planting trees and for the protection of terrestrial and aquatic areas.

If it cannot, in your words, "measure, monitor and report", what is your expectation for these programs to succeed?

• (1715)

Mr. Andrew Hayes: That would be exactly what we would go in to audit. We would use the criteria the government has set for itself, the expectations it set, and we would hold it to those very criteria. We would report on the progress that it reaches. We would, obviously, base our reports on exactly what we see in doing our work.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: How can you audit a program when there are poor measurements and poor reporting—poor monitoring?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: In those cases, we generally report to Parliament the weaknesses in the measurements and reporting. We bring that forward and we make recommendations for improvement.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: In the case of a project like the tree planting, what are some examples of best practices for measurements that could be used?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I'm not actually familiar with the best practices. That would be something that we would look at when we are designing our audit. We would look at other jurisdictions and the way that they do the measurements and reporting.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Baker, you have five minutes.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and congratulations on your election.

Thank you, all, for joining us today to speak with the committee.

I first want to make a clarification about something that was just being discussed. My understanding is that the tree planting program is actually led by Natural Resources Canada and not the Department of the Environment. I think that's an important context to have in terms of the discussion we were just having.

My first question is for you, Mr. Hayes, and it's with regard to the role that you play. For the sake of my constituents who are watching this in Etobicoke Centre or who will be reading the transcript of this, could you share in a minute or so the importance of the role you play, and what impact you or your office have had?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: The way the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development is structured within the Office of the Auditor General provides a really important assurance to Parliament in the form of audit reports. We are able to use the entire mechanism that is in place for the Auditor General, which has clearly given Parliament credible and reliable reports for decades. We are able to use exactly that same process to support the accountability role that Parliament plays in the areas of environment and sustainable development.

Mr. Yvan Baker: To take it a step further, why does that matter in the work that we're doing to protect the environment or to fight climate change? I'm just thinking about this from the perspective of a constituent who might be watching this. Why do those audits matter?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: The work that we do provides independent information to Parliament. We are not advocates. We have a responsibility to be independent. When we come forward with reports such as the one we provided recently on the transportation of dangerous goods, which bring forward areas for improvement the departments can make that will have a direct impact on the safety and health of Canadians, I can't think of a more important role.

That can be expanded to every audit that we do, whether it's climate change, where we're encouraging the government to take steps to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change, or biodiversity, where we are encouraging the government to follow through on the commitments it has made, and measuring and reporting on the progress it has made—where it has.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Mr. Hayes.

My next question is for Ms. Hogan.

Ms. Hogan, could you speak to the importance of having environmental and sustainable development expertise involved across your audits?

Ms. Karen Hogan: One of the sustainable development goals—I believe it's sustainable development goal 16 that talks about good accountable institutions—gives us an opportunity to take a bit of that expertise and make sure it's everywhere. Every audit that we do, whether it be a financial audit or special examination or a performance audit, should be able to identify which sustainable development goal our work is touching and then be able to comment on whether or not the organization is helping to move that yardstick to improve the country.

Sustainable development goals connect with so many important issues that are relevant to all Canadians, and we have an opportunity, as an entire organization, to be able to help the government stay focused on improving in that area.

• (1720)

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you.

Ms. Hogan, in an earlier discussion that you were having with Ms. Collins, there was a discussion about reallocation of people within your organization.

I'm wondering if you could take the remaining time to talk about how they were reallocated and how that allows environmental and

sustainable development issues to be addressed and audited in all of your audits.

Ms. Karen Hogan: Thank you.

I don't think we reallocated our people, really. We just sat down and took a much more global view to our audit practices and ensured that we have the right people in the right place. That's a decision everyone should be looking at when they run an organization, but it's one that's forced upon you when you have some constraints related to your staffing. You recognize that you need to use your people in the best way possible.

Some of our performance auditors have a huge knowledge, as I said, and huge expertise in this area. They are still focusing in on that work, but they're also able to share that knowledge and increase it across our organization.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pausé, you have the floor again.

Ms. Monique Pausé: Audits are important to us as members of Parliament, and they help us do our job. The committee receives reports from the Office of the Auditor General, but does not receive any reports in advance from the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. It seems to me that, if those reports came to us in preliminary form and were then presented to the Office of the Auditor General, that would be a solution. As a committee, we could bring ideas and our concerns to the table.

Ms. Karen Hogan: You are referring to some of the things that perhaps guide how we select our mandates or choose the subjects of our audits. We're always happy to hear what interests parliamentarians. It gives us another point of reference for choosing what we are going to audit.

Ms. Monique Pausé: No, no, I wasn't in the—

Ms. Karen Hogan: You mean the submission of our reports. All our reports go to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts; that is how we are set up. Any parliamentary committee could invite us to appear and we would be very happy to talk about our work.

Ms. Monique Pausé: All right.

I'm going to return to a question I asked at the very beginning. I am referring to Ms. Gelfand's final report, where she brought up the fact that fossil fuel subsidies are not clearly defined. We can see that the departments have not taken action, because subsidies have increased.

You represent reputable institutions, so isn't it time you had the power to demand follow-up when a report from the Office of the Commissioner comes out and no action is taken?

Ms. Karen Hogan: As Mr. Hayes mentioned earlier, I know the Standing Committee on Public Accounts requires an action plan after each of our reports.

We encourage all departments to act on recommendations we make in our reports and develop an action plan. If the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development wants to consider the reports issued by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, I would encourage you to also invite the departments to consider the reports at the same time and to ask them in advance—

The Chair: Time is up, thank you.

Thank you for your answer.

[*English*]

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

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

First, I have a quick yes or no question.

Ms. Hogan, you had mentioned that you hadn't met with any leaders from Canada's environmental organizations yet. I'm curious. Are you committed to meeting with some of them before the selection process happens?

Ms. Karen Hogan: I have received communication from them. If I don't find a good calibre candidate in the current search that I'm doing, I am committed to expand that to use, perhaps, the services of a headhunter if I need to.

I do invite them to reach out to our office if they would like to make some recommendations for us as we do this very important search for a new commissioner.

• (1725)

Ms. Laurel Collins: It sounds like you're not willing to meet with the people who are reaching out to you about this hiring process.

Ms. Karen Hogan: No one has asked specifically to meet with me about the process, but I have received letters from them, inquiring when I would start the process. I did write back to them to let them know that we started that on October 23.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Great, so you would be willing, if people wanted to meet with you about the selection of the new environment commissioner...?

Ms. Karen Hogan: I'm always very interested in meeting with stakeholders who are interested in our work, and I would love to see increased community engagement—

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you so much, Ms. Hogan. I have such limited time.

Three audits were paused in early 2020. When do you plan on restarting these audits, and what are the planned dates for completion?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: In terms of the audits that have been delayed because of a number of factors related to COVID, we do expect to report on the audits in 2021, in particular the natural health products and the implementation of the sustainable development goals in the spring, and the audit on water basins in the fall.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Mr. Hayes, you mentioned the limited budget. I am concerned that the Liberal government isn't providing adequate resources for the office of the environment commissioner to

do its important work, especially given the reduction in the amount of environmental audits compared with the last four years.

It does sound that way to me, given what Ms. Hogan said about finding the right place for the right people and that these environmental auditors are now sharing that knowledge doing other audits. I'm curious on your take. I've put forward a motion to make the role of the environment commissioner an independent agent of Parliament. I'm curious what the difference would be in the work, specifically for environmental audits and for budgeting.

The Chair: Respond very briefly, please.

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I would say that the political decision to carve off the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development would mean that the agent of Parliament, if that motion was to be passed, would have to also set up an office and have their own staff. They would end up making all the decisions and their funding would be set for specifically that purpose. It would be a marked departure from the system we have right now.

The Chair: Okay. I have a couple of things. We now go back to the Conservatives, and I'm assuming that we keep the same order as previously. That's number one.

Number two, it's 5:30, and I'm wondering, first, if the committee would be open to continuing until six o'clock. As well, would the witnesses be available to stay until six?

Maybe we would could find out first if the committee wishes to continue until six.

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do have members who have been at these meetings all day. I recognize, though, that there are some other members who want to ask questions.

Maybe the chair could canvass to ask it would be fair if each member had two minutes to ask their questions. We have to respect the members who have been working all day and at the same time have made other appointments.

The Chair: Are you suggesting that each member of the committee get two minutes?

Mr. Dan Albas: I'm just saying that maybe you canvass and see who is actually interested. If they raise their hand, they would prefer another two minutes. If it gets to be where everyone is going to ask questions, then maybe we'll just continue with the regular round, but I think there may be only one or two members.

The Chair: I assume no one on the Conservative side wants to ask a question at this point. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Dan Albas: I think everyone on my side is fine.

• (1730)

The Chair: Ms. Collins, do you have more questions?

[*Translation*]

Do you have any other questions, Ms. Pauzé?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: No, thank you.

I would rather present a motion.

The Chair: Okay.

Do the Liberals have any other questions?

Mr. Saini, do you have any questions?

Let me know if you have any other questions.

I see no further questions, so Ms. Collins, would you like to take two and a half minutes?

[*English*]

Ms. Laurel Collins: That would be wonderful. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Hogan, we had been talking before about how the job of the Office of the Auditor General and the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development is really to assess the risks to Canadians, to focus on the most important of those risks and then to audit the federal government's response to them. Assessing environmental risk requires unique experience and expertise in the field in which those audits are occurring.

From what I've heard you say, it's not necessarily a real allocation, but many of those performance auditors are working on other audits and sharing their knowledge. It sounds like there have been fewer environmental audits happening over the past year in comparison with the four years before.

I'm curious how you see this expertise being used within the office. If, in fact, there haven't been hires or even recruitment for environmental experts, how is that environmental expertise occurring in your office?

Ms. Karen Hogan: We do have a lot of environmental expertise within our office. We have individuals like Ms. Leach, who is here and has been with the office and working in the environment for most of her career—for decades.

We have a lot of incredible individuals who have tons of years of experience. Where we feel that we have a gap we will absolutely hire that expertise. Hopefully we will be successful in getting additional funding as we embark on increasing our capacity and rebuilding our performance audit practice. That includes performance auditors who will issue and work on things under the commissioner of the environment's banner.

We will hire all across. We will make sure that we—

Ms. Laurel Collins: Ms. Hogan, thank you so much. That's helpful.

I hear that you'll recruit staff across all backgrounds. Specifically, I want to hear a commitment that you're going to be recruiting staff with strong environmental backgrounds.

Ms. Karen Hogan: Absolutely, we need experts in all fields that we plan on auditing. If we can't find them, we will get them through contracts.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Fabulous.

Thank you so much to the witnesses and to the members for your good questions.

I believe Madame Pauzé would like to table a motion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know I need to send it to the clerk.

Further to Ms. Hogan's answer, I'd like the committee to ask the Minister of Transport to meet with us to follow up on the 2011 recommendations. A damning report came out, but no action has been taken in the last nine years.

Transporting hazardous materials means oil, gas and plastics. It is therefore within our committee's mandate to get answers about this.

The Chair: Great.

So you are submitting a motion to the clerk in writing, is that right?

Perfect.

Before requesting a motion to adjourn, I would like to remind committee members that we will soon begin the study requested in Ms. Collins' motion. It is a study on Volkswagen and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

The clerk is requesting me to ask you to deliver the list of witnesses you wish to invite for the study requested by Ms. Collins by the end of the day on Monday, November 23.

If we have nothing else, I am requesting a motion to adjourn the meeting.

• (1735)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: I move to adjourn.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Perfect, thank you.

So I will see you all at the next meeting.

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