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**Chair**

**Mr. Alan Tonks**

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## Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Thursday, November 17, 2005

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.)):** We have a quorum. If we could have everyone sit down, we will definitely have a quorum.

Thank you.

We are a little late, and I apologize for that, Madam Commissioner.

This is the 60th meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. Pursuant to the Standing Orders, today we have the report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development for the year 2005. Under discussion is chapter 7, sustainable development strategies, which was referred to the committee on September 29, 2005.

Members of the committee will remember that we had taken the portions with respect to a strategic development framework, and we wanted to further follow up on that. In accordance with those directions, we had the David Suzuki Foundation and the televideo conference with the U.K. Department for Sustainable Development at our last meeting. This is kind of part two to that.

Madam Commissioner, we welcome you and Mr. Maxwell.

We'll follow the usual process and procedure. I see that you have prepared some notes for a preliminary statement, and we'll then have an opportunity to enter into a dialogue with you.

Thank you for being here.

Madam Gélinas, the floor is yours.

[Translation]

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas (Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, committee members.

Thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee to discuss chapter 7 of my 2005 report concerning sustainable development strategies. With me is Mr. Neil Maxwell, whom most of you now know. Neil has been working for a number of years on monitoring sustainable development for the Office of the Commissioner.

Before I begin, Mr. Chairman, if I may, I would like to tell those who are here today and with whom I have worked over the past five years how strongly I feel about sustainable development initiatives

and strategies. This is an extremely important part of environmental protection and sustainable development. It is a tool that the government has given itself. I am delighted that today we can devote an entire committee meeting to this issue. In closing, I will focus my remarks on the single most important message from chapter 7.

Despite its many recent environment and sustainable development initiatives, the government does not have an overall environment and sustainable development plan. As a result, parliamentarians and Canadians have no clear idea of where the federal government plans to go, or how it intends to get there. And departments do not have the direction needed for their own environment and sustainable development efforts.

Such a plan, in the form of a federal sustainable development strategy, has been promised by the government many times, and was recommended in your committee's report on climate change and in chapter 7 of my report.

[English]

In response to our recommendations, the government has recommitted to developing a federal sustainable development strategy for mid-2006. We're talking six months from now. It has indicated that this will be the responsibility of the Ad Hoc Committee of Cabinet on Sustainability and the Environment, supported by the Privy Council Office and the Committee of Deputy Ministers on the Environment and Sustainability. Further, the Prime Minister has given the Minister of Environment the responsibility of leading, guiding, and coordinating departmental sustainable development strategies.

To me, the key question is how this effort will succeed where others have failed.

Indeed, the government faces several significant challenges that your committee's scrutiny can help overcome. Developing a good plan takes time, which makes the mid-2006 deadline ambitious. We understand that work is just now getting under way. Time will be required to consult government officials, stakeholders, and ministers. Fortunately, past work on a federal sustainable developmental strategy can be used as a starting point. It is critical that Environment Canada and the Privy Council Office have a comprehensive work plan to ensure they meet this time commitment and give departments direction for their December 2006 strategy. Previous efforts to develop a strategy have suffered in part from a lack of staff and resources and leadership by the responsible deputy minister committee. Roles and responsibilities have been unclear. The government needs to demonstrate that it has finally addressed these problems.

A federal sustainable development strategy could create confusion and duplication with Project Green and competitiveness and environmental sustainability framework initiatives. In my view, a single overall government environment and sustainable development plan is needed to integrate all three, or at least provide clear links among the separate plans.

Earlier this week you learned about two models for an overall environmental and sustainable development plan: the United Kingdom's sustainable development strategy and the Suzuki Foundation's "Sustainability within a Generation". These and other models show that what is needed in a federal sustainable development strategy is, first, a compelling vision of the sustainable Canada that the federal government seeks; second, a forthright discussion of the key sustainability challenges and opportunities we face; third, the government's key sustainable development priorities; and finally, specific commitments to actions stemming from the priorities with outcomes and responsibilities identified.

• (1540)

[Translation]

The plan must also explain how implementation will be assured, namely: the government's expectations of departments, including how departmental strategies will be used to respond to the federal sustainable development strategy; overall government targets, where appropriate, on which departments will base their individual targets; and the way the government will demonstrate the results to Parliament and Canadians. Most importantly, a good plan will drive new initiatives, not just catalogue existing ones—one of my main criticisms of previous department strategies. And this will take strong leadership. For example, as you heard, in the UK, the sustainable development strategy has been led by the Prime Minister and ministers.

I will close by saying how pleased I am that this issue has been getting attention in different quarters. The Suzuki Foundation has recently talked about the need for an overall environment and sustainable development plan. So has your chair, in his recent article in the *Hill Times*. Honourable John Godfrey, Minister of State for Infrastructure and Communities, is pushing the need for overall sustainability plans at the community level.

I believe that a strong message from this committee could go a long way to ensure that the plan becomes a reality. Given the poor

track record in this area, regular progress reports to this committee will be important.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for your attention. Neil and I would be pleased to answer any questions.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Gélinas.

We'll go up to the top of the batting order and have Mr. Richardson make his pitch.

**Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, let me begin where you ended, with the suggestion that a strong message from this committee might be helpful. I think on more occasions than one a strong message has been sent from this committee to suggest that there are lacks in the government initiatives, a strategic plan, a coordinated, consistent plan. This is something you have often commented on as well, although not to the extent of the government's responses. Even your reaction seems to be riddled with euphemisms, such as "the plan was ambitious", when really it's pretty clear the plan was impossible. I think the sooner we recognize that, the easier it will be to achieve realistic goals and to bring people together to pursue those goals.

As a committee, we had lunch today with American representatives who went through their plan. Obviously, it's not as ambitious a strategy for dealing with greenhouse gas emissions and climate change as the proposed Canadian plans, such as they are, but it's one with much more recognizable and identifiable achievements in reaching the goals that we would all like to see.

I'd like to ask you—because it's a question that's come up so often and we seem to have a lot of talk from the government and not many consistent or identifiable results—about the number of times your office has called for a federal sustainable development strategy and about the government's responses to your recommendation. Has the government ever followed through on what it promised to do in its responses?

• (1545)

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** Obviously, this is an area where the answer is quite simple. We have asked many times for that federal plan, and each time we asked for it we've had a response from the government that it will work on it. As we speak, we haven't seen anything that may look like a plan.

Having said that, if I may just bring this back to one of my comments on the overall report for 2005, looking at some root causes, I have said that the government has this tendency to reinvent the wheel quite often. This is an area where I don't want to mislead anybody in the sense that some work has been done. I talked in my opening statement about Project Green and also about this competitiveness and environmental sustainability framework. In the past, some other work has been done to come up with something that may have looked like a federal strategy, but we're not there yet.

So some efforts have been made. We have bits and pieces of what can one day become a federal strategy, but as we speak, we don't have this overall picture of what a sustainable Canada may look like 20 years from now.

**Mr. Lee Richardson:** Thank you.

We've also had several comments from the Minister of Environment here at this committee, as well as in and outside the House, with regard to his mandate to "take on the role of providing leadership, guidance, and coordination in the development of departmental sustainable development strategies across the federal government and agencies".

You mentioned in your remarks that the ad hoc committee and the deputy minister's committee have mandates to produce and implement sustainable development strategies and frameworks. There's also Project Green, which emanates from the Prime Minister's Office, again, with a number of proposed initiatives—sometimes a bit cloudy. Is it clear to you what each mandate is and who's accountable for what?

**Ms. Johanne G  linas:** No, it is not clear to me what the roles and responsibilities are in the government to make that happen. When I was talking earlier about some progress, I have to say that this ad hoc committee didn't exist a year and a half ago. There's a new chair for the deputy minister's committee, so this is new too. There are some actions that were taken, but still it's not clear to me who will do what—beyond the fact that Minister Dion has had a clear mandate from the Prime Minister—because that has to be a joint effort by all departments to build that vision of a sustainable Canada.

**Mr. Lee Richardson:** Thank you.

I'd like to pass to Mr. Jean, whose riding is particularly affected by these matters.

**Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC):** I'd like to thank you, Madam G  linas, for appearing before us. It's always useful to have you here for your own efforts, not necessarily for your reporting functions. I find it very depressing every time I'm involved in these committee meetings, where we have some recognition of the role the government has been playing.

I would like to talk about implementation. I know we've talked a little bit about it with Mr. Richardson. How do we ensure that this strategy is developed and implemented at every level of government? There has to be a simpler answer.

In 1991 we talked about it. We researched it, we did some more talking about it, and we had a plan. Then we did the same thing in 1992, 1993, and 1994. We've done it right up to today. We have lots of talk, lots of research, and lots of planning, but no implementation.

Quite frankly, it's depressing, and it's going to lead I think to an economic and environmental disaster in Canada.

I'd like to hear your comments on implementation. How do we go to the next step, besides the talk?

**Ms. Johanne G  linas:** On your side, you say it's depressing. On my side, I can see a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel, so let's say I'm optimistic for the future.

Let me just give a little bit of background here. I asked Neil earlier, before we came here, to bring a copy with him of what was called *A Guide to Green Government*. It was developed in 1995 and is really the foundation for the SDSs that were developed after that by the departments. The first one came in 1997.

This is not to say there is no work that has been done by the departments in trying to move their department, with respect to their mandate, on a sustainable path. This is not what we are questioning here today. Really, what we are asking is to have the overall framework so that the departments will know exactly what the priorities are and what needs to be done, because we were told this so many times.

Just to give you an example of how it can be confusing for departments, in 2001 there was the beginning of a federal strategy, with some specific priorities that should be considered. If we go even before that, in 1997 there were five objectives. The departments were supposed to work towards those five objectives, and if you want the details, Neil can give you that. In 2001 they arrived with eight teams, and in 2004 they came with three priorities: international commitments, house in order, and the other one was fresh water.

So the departments are always facing new priorities, even if they're not clear, because they are never told, these are the priorities for the next coming years and this is what you have to do in terms of moving toward a sustainable path. So it's quite confusing. That may answer, in part, your question about why we don't see the implementation taking place.

Some departments more than others are doing their fair share to try to advance on sustainability, but we need to get a clear indication from the highest level of government about what the priorities are and how we have to achieve them. One of the recommendations we are making is to have that, which is basically the federal SDS, and then it has to be translated at the departmental level.

Mr. Chair, if I may add one thing, there are challenges everywhere. You heard Jill Rutter from the United Kingdom earlier this week. In this case, they have decided to go with a top-down approach, but they are facing challenges too when the time comes to translate that at the ministerial level and the departmental level.

We decided in Canada to go the other way around—and we don't discuss if it was the right way or the wrong way; it was the approach Canada decided to go with. Now we are facing the situation where we have 29 or 30 or so SDSs, but we don't know what the destination is. So we need that portion that is missing, and then we can link the two so that we will all be able to move in the same direction to get to the same place some time in the future.

Thank you.

•(1550)

**Mr. Brian Jean:** In essence, I think what you're telling me is we're not getting clear communication from the Prime Minister's office, or from the top, which obviously is the Prime Minister's office.

I have two questions. First, as my friend mentioned, I was very pleased to hear a great report today when we went to the U.S. ambassador's house for lunch. Actually, I was shocked at how much they've done towards global warming and how much they've spent. I think it was \$20 billion in the last five years in dealing with global warming. I was very impressed with that. In fact, they mentioned they didn't sign Kyoto because it didn't go far enough and didn't include enough countries. I'm not going to debate that, because I'm sure this could be debated.

I would like your comments on the Asia-Pacific agreement, if you're familiar with it. I'd also like to know what the advantages or disadvantages Canada would have in being involved with it. Also, I'd like to know how far away the light in the tunnel you seem to see is, because I don't see the light, not with what's going on. It seems like a confused black tunnel, because everybody is stumbling around and hitting the walls without going anywhere.

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** I certainly cannot comment or give you any kind of response to your first question.

With respect to our optimism, what is important to note is how we can share optimism in the future. The only thing I would like to say is that there is momentum now. This committee has to find a way in the near future—let's say in the spring—to continue building on that momentum. We have had clear commitments this time from the Privy Council, the ad hoc committee in some way, and also the DM committee. I hope you will have the opportunity to question the chair of that committee next week, or at least representatives from Environment Canada. What we need to know is how they're going to get there now that they have clearly made the commitment, and what will be put in place so we can see progress on your side in the short term and on my side later on. Then you can ask the government to testify before this committee and tell us what progress has been made.

When I'm talking about the momentum, keep in mind that the new or fourth generation of strategies, if you will, is due at the end of 2006. Last time we missed the boat because some orientations—the few that were given—arrived too late. We have to make sure that this time, by spring at the latest, there will be some clear indication to the departments, and we will have a draft—it was only that—of a federal strategy that will help departments get on the right path.

•(1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

In terms of time, you're right on the button.

Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here today, Ms. Gélinas.

It seems obvious to me, in the report that you have tabled as well as in the government's response to your recommendations, that there is a clear will to give Canada a general plan and a strategy for sustainable development. What stands out in your brief is that, despite the fact that the government has committed to draft a plan to be tabled here in 2006, you believe the deadline is too short to allow us to come up with an effective plan.

Today you state that there will most probably be a plan, because the government has made a commitment. However, will the plan really allow us to meet the sustainable development objectives? The government claims that a plan by the middle of next year will clearly set out the key objectives, etc.

However, in your report, you say that a plan is not enough because we must also include the performance agreements of some departments. Do you think that the deputy ministers' performance agreements will be part of the plan that will allow us to move towards sustainable development? It is one thing to have a plan with objectives by the middle of 2006, but that does not guarantee the development, implementation and follow-up in various departments.

Do you think that such a plan should include these elements?

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** First, Mr. Chairman, I said in my brief that it was ambitious to think that we can indeed have a plan by the end of next spring, but I did not say that it could not be done. I might remind you that a significant amount of work has been done in the past few years.

In 2001, the government had clearly outlined the federal strategy, just before the Earth Summit in Johannesburg. That was the last time we heard about the plan; it was never completed. I say in my brief that we already have a foundation and we should build on it instead of starting from scratch. Of course, I don't know what the plan will look like if the government respects its commitment within the next six months.

As to your last point, it is true that we recommended that the deputy ministers' and assistant deputy ministers' performance contracts should clearly state that they must deliver a plan and respect clearly identified commitments. It would certainly help to have performance indicators in the departments' contracts and in deputy ministers' and assistant deputy ministers' contracts.

This is something that Neil was more involved with. He might have something to add.

•(1600)

[*English*]

**Mr. Neil Maxwell (Principal, Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development):** In terms of integrating these kinds of requirements in the DM contracts and such, I think it's fair to say that we were quite disappointed. We made the recommendation that it should happen, and we were quite disappointed that the Privy Council Office said, more or less, that the current system was working fine.

I notice they had a very similar response when you recommended something similar in your climate change plan.

I thought it was very interesting earlier this week when you heard testimony from Jill Rutter on another example of how that could be done, when she talked about the public service agreements they have in the U.K. I recall her testimony, where she said that those really drove their senior officials and really got them focused on things.

So I think the interesting thing from examples like that is that it shows that it is possible to do that. I think part of our disappointment with the response to our recommendation was that we didn't see an alternative put forward. If they didn't like our idea, that would be fine, as we don't have all of the great ideas. But we would have expected some alternative idea to be put forward—and we didn't see that.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Maxwell.

Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** You spoke about performance indicators. A number of countries use performance indicators, including Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, etc.

Which ones should be integrated? I don't know if the Auditor General Act would have to be amended in order to do that. What performance indicators could be developed to ensure that the sustainable development objectives are respected by various departments?

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** We are talking about performance indicators that have nothing to do with the deputy ministers' performance contracts. We did not look into that. There has never been an audit of future work. In the future, we will examine the various indicators that have been used and will review how our own indicators have been integrated, because some of our sustainable development indicators are in the process of being instituted.

At this stage, I can't tell you which ones are the best and which ones are the worst. However, I can add that we are now working with the OECD and that, sometime next summer, there will be a symposium to take a serious look at the sustainable development indicators. Then we will see if they can be used as a criterion to measure the government's progress.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Do you think that the OECD indicators that are used by the David Suzuki Foundation might apply to Canada or do you think that we should use the indicators developed by the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy?

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** Indicators are developed worldwide. The onus is on the government to determine which indicators best fit the situation in Canada. That is more of a question for the federal government.

The OECD indicators which I referred to earlier are not used by the David Suzuki Foundation. Another OECD group worked on the sustainable development indicators.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bigras.

Mr. Wilfert.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As you know, the minister appeared before the committee on October 4, and further to the Speech from the Throne of 2004, he outlined the Ad Hoc Committee of Cabinet on Sustainable Development.

As you know, in April, the minister announced Project Green. I know the issue of competitiveness and the environmental sustainable framework is something that is extremely important to the Minister of the Environment; it has been the aim to develop an integrated and comprehensive approach. The full range of sustainable challenges is obviously linking policy with action, and that has been his mantra I think, certainly since July 20, 2004, when we both took on our respective positions.

I'm sure you also know that the deputy minister's policy committee on the environment and sustainable development has been working as well. It is the goal, in fact, to have things in place by the spring of 2006.

Clearly, we have, I think—and I would like someone to tell me otherwise—the most aggressive plan of the G7 with regard to the issue of climate change. In that, we talk about sustainability of cities and communities, and we talk about sustainability of agriculture and forests.

I would agree with you that there is light, and the light is obviously coming pretty quickly. A lot of things that are done, are not done obviously in front of the TV cameras, but the reality is that the government is committed to a very strong and effective sustainable development strategy. I would agree with you that we do need to have one in place, not only to tell Canadians, but also to make sure that the entire bureaucracy is in lockstep with where we are going.

In terms of the work that is going on, both from the minister's perspective and obviously the deputy minister's policy committee on the environment and sustainability, is it my understanding from your comments—and correct me if I'm wrong—that you have not heard of or seen any progress? Is this simply that you're not in the loop, or is it in fact that you'd like to see more detail?

• (1605)

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When we closed the book on the audit, which was June 2005, I have to say that based on the information we collected through the course of the audit, we hadn't seen a lot in terms of what this deputy minister's committee had done. Having said that, if I look at what we said the year before, I have to admit that some action has been taken. The jury is still out on the results and the outcome of that; we don't know.

On our side, it's certain that there's a need for further clarification, in particular with what I stated earlier. The linkages between Project Green and the framework...for me these are shells. We have to understand what falls under them and how a new document at some point, which might be the federal SDS, will fit with these other two.

Are we going to have three different programs that will all be parallel? Maybe that's the government decision; we just want to understand better how all these pieces fit together so that we can see—as with the metaphor I have used in the past—the picture on the puzzle box.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:** There's no question, Mr. Chairman, that the creation of the deputy minister's policy committee by the Clerk of the Privy Council certainly is of the highest concern to the Prime Minister, the minister, and others in terms of making sure we deliver. I would certainly say that having it comprehensive, with more coherency and certainly more transparency in terms of developing just what you have indicated, is the intent.

As you know, the minister welcomed your report. We did comment, of course, about the fact that the timeframe was at a certain period, and of course a lot has taken place. I think very positive changes have occurred since your report, which I'm sure we'll be measuring in your next report to us.

I want to emphasize that if there's any information, anything that the minister's office or the minister could be helpful with, we're certainly more than happy to work collaboratively. There's no question that we believe it's a priority. I've said to the minister from the beginning, and I've certainly repeated it on many occasions, that we believe we can have a sustainable economy and a green economy at the same time. We say that not only about conditions at home, but we talk about that abroad.

We're about to host probably the most important international climate change conference in recent memory, in Montreal. I would hope, Mr. Chairman, politics aside, that we will get all of the parties to work collaboratively to put forward that the science is indisputable. The question is now on the role we're taking. What is it that the government has identified as its priorities in terms of creating this environmentally sustainable framework?

I believe we are now putting into action exactly what you're asking for on areas of climate change, environmental stewardship, health, etc. The minister did try, I believe, very clearly and very strongly—I believe it was during his appearance on October 4—to outline that.

I would just say if there's anything you need, or if there are issues that should be addressed to provide more light... Usually a work in progress isn't put out before it's finished. I can assure you, particularly because it has the strong support of the Prime Minister, that it is our intent to deliver.

• (1610)

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** Mr. Chair, if I may just make a comment, I have to say, in the course of the audit work I have done with Neil's team over the last year, this DM committee reminds me of a black box. We still don't know exactly what the committee is doing or what its mandate is, what it is trying to accomplish. And if, like the member just said, there are a lot of things going on, I think all Canadians and parliamentarians would benefit from some regular status reports on progress made by the committee. I have to say I'm looking forward to hearing about actions and progress made in this area.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:** Mr. Chairman, I would just conclude by saying that when the minister was before the committee in October, I

think he made it abundantly clear the need for a government-wide sustainable development strategy—and we absolutely concur with your comments. We are working on it, and it is, I would say, one of the very top priorities of the government. Hopefully, now that we have Project Green, now that we have a \$10 billion fund from the budget of 2005, now that we have the tools in place—and we'd obviously like more tools. Part of the tool box has to be this sustainable development strategy, and it will be in place.

Mr. Chairman, I would be more than happy, next year, to come back and report on that for you.

**Mr. Lee Richardson:** I'll bet you'd be happy to come back at all.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:** Believe me, Mr. Richardson.... Although there are some doubters on that side, Mr. Chairman, about the government policy, it's always good that there's a deathbed confession, even from my friends in the official opposition at times, on the support for climate change.

**The Chair:** Fortunately, the issue of who's going to be back isn't before us at the moment. That will be before another court.

We're going to go back to Mr. Jean, who has his five minutes now.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have no doubt about government policy, because I've read it. I have a lot of doubt about implementation, because there is none.

That goes to my next question. We heard from Ms. Rutter yesterday from Great Britain that they have some different reporting functions. Every six months, each minister is required to report on implementation. Do you think that would be a more effective method than what we have here? Have you compared the implementation of Great Britain and Canada...?

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** We haven't compared them, but I'm sure Neil has a lot to say about this reporting mechanism.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** I only have five minutes, so not too much. I'd appreciate it some other time.

**Mr. Neil Maxwell:** It will be short.

There are a lot of models there, and the U.K. model was certainly a useful one for this committee to have heard. There are many other models too.

A lot of these things are so simple. Reporting every six months is such a simple idea that there should be nothing impeding it.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** In other words, it would be a great idea to copy some other plans that are working well in other jurisdictions and implement them in our own system of reporting. Is that what I'm hearing, Mr. Maxwell?



**Mr. Neil Maxwell:** Certainly something we've often talked to this committee about is this idea that the accountability loop is much stronger when you have simple mechanisms, such as every six months coming back to say this is what has been committed to and this is the progress that's being made. It's not rocket science.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** In essence, we're in a classroom in the world. I'd like to do a comparative analogy because that's the only way you can tell who's doing well and who's not. I'm certain you read the David Suzuki Foundation report. I read it with interest and discovered we're 28th out of 30 in OECD countries, which is very embarrassing considering what we give as hype to our own citizens—which obviously isn't followed through with any type of implementation, as I've said. I understand that even our progress is less than the average OECD country for the last 10 years.

Can you comment on that report and the findings?

• (1615)

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** You will be disappointed because I will not comment on that report. I read it myself. We never did that kind of comparison. For the first time, through the work we're doing on climate change, we may be able to make some sort of comparison—more in terms of programs that were put in place here and elsewhere, and the results.

What I can say, though, is that we also read the OECD report with great interest, and there are some weaknesses identified there that we identified in past years through our work. They made recommendations that sometimes looked pretty much like the ones we made. We are on the same page in the sense that we are identifying some of the same weaknesses, from different angles perhaps, but still. Environmental issues are well-known here. As you said, and as I have said many times myself, the issue is implementation.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Like classrooms, in fact, I would suggest that if we were to report back on your recommendations, or at least have the government departments and the ministers report back on your recommendations—and the federal SDS and anything else that comes forward—on a six-month basis, do you think that would be a more effective method than what currently is taking place?

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** That would be a great step forward, as far as I'm concerned. As you may know, we have individual SDSs, so we have a partial portrait of the situation. But if we were to have one strategy with clear objectives and actions and measurable targets and so on, you could ask on a yearly basis—or more often if you want—for a kind of report card on progress. We will have the basis and follow up on that, so we will see where we are moving in terms of biodiversity, climate change, and so on. We need that kind of information gathering so we can have the big picture, which we don't have.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Who would you suggest would be best to come forward with the big picture? Would your department be ready to prepare a criteria on reporting?

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** For the big picture, it's really the federal strategy that will give us what the government is aiming for. Then we will have indicators, and the government knows pretty well how to establish indicators.

We can audit the progress they are making with some of those indicators, but we will not set up for the government what the indicators should be.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** With respect, we have used enough paper and trees to create enough criteria for the rest of the world. Again, my first comment is that talk is cheap. We talk, talk, talk. There is no implementation. We need some basic sets of criteria to have the government implement.

With so many forests we've devastated with all the paperwork, do you not think we could come up with some sort of strategy? Or could your department come up with a strategy that the government could adopt, at least, and then try to implement?

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** We have done some work over the past years to help the department identify how a sustainable strategy should be made up. We did that twice, and we thought it was not our role to do those kinds of things.

We don't get into policy, as you know. We will let the government decide what should be the good indicators to report on progress. The best we can do is to audit whatever progress they say they have made and report back to you, and then you will be in a position to judge. That's the best we can offer you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Thank you.

It certainly is a bit complicated. The danger here is an additional layer of bureaucracy. I quite agree with my colleague: we can enhance accountability, implement indicators, demonstrate that departments are not honouring their commitments and that there is no follow-up or enforcement. However, will all that ensure that we embrace sustainable development? We need to make sure that departments are subject to such regulatory and statutory requirements such as strategic environmental assessments. We could set up an organization responsible for this, as you suggested. Still, this won't guarantee anything. The Department of Finance, for example, may very well continue to shy away from strategic assessments.

Should the government decide to table a plan mid-2006, we will have to take responsibility for what is being put forward. Don't you think that that should be done through a strategic environmental assessment? Departments would not only be compelled to consider economic factors when making daily decisions. All decisions, policies, plans, programs and government bills would be subject to an environmental assessment.

For the last 20 years, the Prime Minister's Office directives have not been enforced. However, rather than establishing a new organization to develop and implement oversight mechanisms, don't you think we should just get tough by making it a legal obligation for departments to carry out strategic environmental assessments? My fear is that a new organization will be established which will reach the same conclusions as yours. Similar reports would point to the fact that the Department of Finance is dragging its feet. At the end of the day, will anything have actually changed?

• (1620)

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** Mr. Chair, when we talked about establishing a new organization, we were referring basically to a small secretariat which would support the deputy ministers' ad hoc committee's work. I'm not talking about a major organizational structure. You have to acknowledge that there is a problem when you try to develop a national sustainable development strategy and when no money is brought to the table to back it up. This, in our opinion, is one of the main reasons why implementation hasn't been quicker.

Mr. Wilfert referred earlier to the many tools available to the government. I have always said that strategic environmental assessments were one of the most powerful tools. Such assessments may ensure that departments really do take the environment and sustainable development into consideration when making decisions. Now, should this be statutory? It's up to you to consider that question.

Last year's report clearly demonstrates that in the past, strategic environmental assessments were not carried out by departments, despite a very clear Privy Council directive to that effect. When it comes time to track the implementation of such a directive, we'll see whether the results are convincing. Otherwise, it will be up to you to decide what measures must be taken to ensure compliance with the directive. Clearly, sustainable development strategies are tools which will never replace strategic environmental assessments of programs, plans and other government priorities.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Are you saying that under the sustainable development strategy to be outlined in 2006, that we should, in your opinion, make sure that departments are under an obligation to carry out strategic environmental assessments?

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** I suggest that the strategic environmental assessment be considered as one of the tools that can help us to ensure that a federal sustainable development strategy will be properly implemented. It would appear that this implementation cannot be done without a strategic environmental assessment.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bigras. We're out of time on that.

Mr. St. Amand.

**Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you to Ms. Gélinas and Mr. Maxwell.

I had an opportunity in March of this year to attend a conference in the United Kingdom with the Minister of the Environment, Mr. Dion. It was a precursor to the summit in Gleneagle, Scotland, in July of this year. I spoke with many officials from the various countries that were represented at the March session and heard a significant number of very laudatory comments about the progress

Canada has made in this area and, frankly, the leadership role Canada has taken.

There was enthusiasm for sure expressed by those present at that conference about Canada's hosting of the COP conference, with which you're undoubtedly familiar and to which Mr. Wilfert has already alluded. I understand the COP conference will be attended by over 150 countries. They will be here in Canada, specifically Montreal, for some ten days. Can you comment on the importance of that conference to the advancing of this particular issue?

• (1625)

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** There are two things, Mr. Chairman, I will say about that. First of all, I have to make a comment on leadership. In the course of the work we have done over the last year, we have said Canada has been a leader in many areas of sustainable development. There's a risk for slippage, and the government has to be very aware of that, and I can give you many examples. The oceans strategy implementation would be an example of that, and we reported on that last September.

With respect to climate change and the COP 11 conference, I'm an auditor; I report on progress. I report on progress based on evidence I get that some progress is made. I'm keeping my conclusions for next September, so you will have to wait that long, as we are in the course of doing a full audit of climate change and greenhouse gas reduction efforts within the federal government. For the moment I cannot tell you anything about that. I'm just hoping that this event will be a great event and that all Canadians will benefit from it.

**Mr. Lloyd St. Amand:** With respect, then, to more sustainable development strategies in particular, are you aware of how many countries actually have a sustainable development strategy in place?

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** We have some information, and we refer to that in our report. Neil can just briefly give you what we know about that so far.

**Mr. Lloyd St. Amand:** Please do that. Thank you.

**Mr. Neil Maxwell:** The latest statistics we have from the UN are that over twenty countries have such a strategy. I have reason to think that's actually probably on the low side, because I've heard informally more recently that a number of other countries have joined that number. It's a relatively large group of countries that have already done what we're saying needs to be done here. Again, those are good models to build on.

**Mr. Lloyd St. Amand:** The quantification of it is likely somewhat difficult, but can you comment on the success experienced by those countries in implementing their own sustainable development strategies?

**Mr. Neil Maxwell:** It's not something we ourselves have done much work on. I have heard others speak. You heard testimony on Tuesday from the Suzuki Foundation, which claims they've looked at that and seen a strong correlation between countries having plans in place and subsequent performance. But we haven't audited that, so I'd be very loath to comment.

**Ms. Johanne G elinas:** If I may just add one point, you may not know this, but I chair, on behalf of the Auditor General of Canada, an international committee called the Working Group on Environmental Auditing. There were 65 countries at our last annual assembly, about three weeks ago in Moscow. We have a three-year work plan that we are in the process of implementing ourselves. And for those countries that have a kind of national sustainable development plan, or federal plan, something at the higher level, we are looking with our colleagues from offices equivalent to the Auditor General at how much progress has been made in this area—what the success stories are and what the barriers for implementation are. We will not be able to report our results on that before 2007, but still, this is something that at some point we will be able to report on.

Just one last thing. The OECD and the Commission on Sustainable Development of the United Nations are both working in this area too. The meeting I was referring to that will take place some time in the summer will give us an opportunity, with all the OECD member countries, to see the success stories related to the implementation of those strategies and what the barriers are, so that we can share some lessons learned and try to overcome some of those barriers with good solutions.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Cullen, I believe the committee will be somewhat generous in the opportunity for you to use the time, since you haven't had an opportunity for your 10 minutes.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** This is one of the reasons I love coming to this committee, Mr. Chair. It's a reasonable and compromising place for common sense to prevail.

I was in the House speaking just recently and I apologize for not being here for the beginning of your presentation, although I have read it.

It's interesting hearing about the 20-plus countries that have set a plan in place. I looked through chapter 7 in your audit. In 1995 there was the "Guide to Green Government", five objectives; in 2000 there was a leaders' forum on sustainable development, eight themes coordinating; in 2004 there were departmental sustainable development strategies and another set of priorities.

How is the average Canadian meant to follow the government's actual plans when it comes to sustainable development? I don't doubt there's some sort of thematic entity existing through all these various incantations and incarnations of the plan, yet I remain confused that a government is able to...and it's the same government; nothing's changed necessarily, although some of the actors have changed—and I use the term liberally. Why has there not been a match to the values of Canadians, who, when you ask them, suggest sustainable development is consistently high on their radar as being important? The government recreates the format in which this thing will happen, rather than creating a vehicle that can be modified over time. But it's the same vehicle and it's the same format.

Were you able to find out why this government is so interested in renaming, relaunching, reformatting the very basis of what it would be to have a sustainable development plan in this country?

**Ms. Johanne G elinas:** What you just referred to is something that I referred to earlier in my presentation. If you're asking how an average Canadian can figure out what the game plan is, I would say "good luck", because even we, who do this for a living, have problems identifying what exactly the game plan is. This is basically what we are asking.

We were talking earlier about Project Green, the sustainability framework, and this federal strategy, and basically this is what we are saying. Let's make sure that somewhere, somehow, we have one game plan that will have whatever name the government will give it, but where we can understand what the priorities are, what we are aiming for, and how we're going to get there. That is basically what we are asking for.

I'm pleased to say I'm not the only one asking for that. The departments, those who are the doers, the ones who have to deliver a sustainable development strategy at the departmental level, are asking for it. We have asked for it. This committee has asked for it in its latest report on climate change. And the Senate committee on environment and energy has asked for the same thing. So if the four of us, including the department, feel there's a need for that, I'm hoping there must be a real need and that this time the government will get the point and will come with something that will be user-friendly, easy to understand for everybody, where we can measure and report back on progress in future years.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Many people involved in this file on the business side, on the environmental side, when talking about the issue—and I'll attach climate change to this for a moment, as a sustainable development issue—have used extremely strong language on how important this effort is. It's that all of our coastal communities around the world and the very basis of our industry and economies are affected by this degradation of the environment with respect to climate change. We've heard the language—the CIA talks about it being the greatest threat to global security—and it's very strong language.

Yet when I come to the government's actions in their reinvention of these plans, I don't at any point get the sense of a unified vision in the way other great challenges have been faced by other governments in other nations. I think the examples I'm going to cite bear some truth. At some point the United States decided they were putting a man on the moon. A vision was held, programs were created, and a structure was implemented to achieve what many thought was an impossible goal. In times of crisis, war or international conflict, oftentimes the leaders of countries call forth a vision of something they believe is enough to entice the population to give up their sons and daughters, potentially.

When I come to sustainable development, when I come to climate change and this government's actions over the last number of years, and when I read your report and hear your comments today that there's a lack of staff, resources, and leadership...we're not putting anybody on the moon and we're not going forth and doing anything. The challenge I have is trying to decide, with respect to the new commitment for 2006, the mid-2006 plan, depending on a number of variables that lie between then and now, what optimism I or any other Canadian should have about that vision being created in the succinct and understandable manner you refer to.

The second part of my question is, what damage is done to our efforts in this country, both on an individual basis for Canadians and on a sectoral basis, whether it be industry or other actors within this question, when we continue to lack that coherence of vision? How much is this holding us up?

• (1635)

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** I will start, Mr. Chair, with the last part of Mr. Cullen's questions.

We don't know what the cost of inaction is, so how much the damages will cost, I cannot tell.

Let's go back to the strategy, and let me give you an example. If we look at the three past generations of strategies, we see there was a time when getting the government house in order and moving toward green procurement, for example, was an important feature of the SDSs. We saw that diminish over the last year; in some departments it's no longer there. Now we are told, as we are doing this audit on green procurement, that green procurement is one of the top priorities of the government. So we will expect in a federal SDS or in an overall game plan—let's call it that—the message will be clear that 10 years from now we would like to have reached this percentage of green procurement across government. That's one thing.

You were talking about climate change. Where is climate change in the overall vision of a sustainable Canada? I cannot tell, and these are the pieces I'm referring to where I would like to see what the big picture is and what we're aiming for. Neil is working now on the adaptation chapter on climate change, and once again, one of the points we make is that if adaptation is to be one of the priorities of the government, it will have to be reflected somewhere in the individual SDSs and also in the federal SDS.

We haven't seen what the federal SDS would look like, but these are the kinds of things, as you just said, that should be reflected somewhere in an overall game plan for the federal government.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll come back to the top. Are there any questions?

Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** At the end of the day, what is important is that in 2006, we will have a plan that will allow us to meet our objectives. I come back to what you said about mid-2006 being an ambitious objective. You think it will take some time to consult the officials, partners and ministers.

What would be your idea of an ideal consultation process? Should there be consultation to ensure that the document that we end up with, by mid-2006 or a little later, is as complete as possible and the best one to guide us through the coming years?

• (1640)

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** Mr. Chairman, I would like to make the members aware of certain facts. In reviewing the sustainable development strategies, we clearly stated that the departments should undertake a consultation on their own strategy. The ministerial approach could serve as a guide.

Moreover, I can't give you a list of who should be consulted. However, I would like to come back to a broad consultation that took place in 2001, and was quite productive. I have often told the government that we never seem to learn from past experience. But this is an example that the government could use when the time comes to ensure that the consultation is carried out in the best possible way. I spent a number of years at the BAPE. Our consultation principles were rather basic. These same principles can apply in any type of consultation. This one is not very different from any of the others.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Why do you say that there should be a public consultation?

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** It is essential that we have a public consultation on sustainable development strategies. That has already been provided for.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Okay.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Any other questions?

While the members are searching for questions....

I'm rather perplexed at your answer in relation to a question that was asked, Ms. Gélinas, and perhaps it's because I don't understand the answer. You said we must remember that your role as an auditor is that you evaluate the initiatives and measurements that have been used in terms of, let's say, carbon reduction, but it's not your role—and I may be paraphrasing incorrectly—to, for example, evaluate on a day-to-day basis what the departments are doing. In other words, yours is an auditing role that clicks in according to legislation. That might be incorrect—it might be.

What I think I'm perplexed about is that we have different programs. We have the cities' agenda, where we are encouraging cities to deal with urban sprawl, to protect their natural environment, and to have growth strategies. We are working with the provinces, who are the overseers of whether the cities are in fact doing that in a sustainable way. In terms of our own procurement policies, we have green funds, which require evaluation and will be contributing to setting an example for carbon reduction. We have technology funds that are to be used for alternate energy sources and for looking at export of those technologies and adding value to our local economy for our international export and competitiveness, if you will. We have partnership funds that are to be used in partnership with municipalities and provinces. There seems to be—in the eyes of the public—no shortage of programs.

And we have heard from the United Kingdom that they're looking at thresholds with respect to evaluating, according to certain measurements, how effective those programs are.

Perhaps you would like to expand on that. One of the concerns you raised was that we haven't embedded that measurement capability and an accountable reporting back to anybody. My suggestion would be that this committee has oversight responsibilities and we haven't completed that loop.

My question is in relation to your observation that we have a deputy minister's committee and we have a minister's committee. If we embed the responsibilities for accountability, reporting, and measuring to the Privy Council—the management arm of the government—would not the citizens rest more easily that the evaluation and value for money were actually being carried out and that this committee would have the oversight function? When you talk about the sustainable development framework, to me, the embedding of that responsibility is part of that strategy.

Would you comment on that in terms of the manner in which I've characterized it? How can the committee in fact invigorate the organization to be more accountable if it doesn't have the right measures and it doesn't have the ability to oversee how those measures are being used?

• (1645)

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** I will let Neil get into the last part of your question. I'm not sure if I have it right, but let me just go back to some of the programs you highlighted that are more related to climate change.

These are programs and they should contribute to an overall objective, which we all know is to reduce greenhouse gas by 6% from 1990. When we do the audits of climate change and we look at those programs, we know what they are supposed to accomplish. We look at them and we report back to you on the results.

When it comes time to get into the sustainability agenda, you mentioned a lot of initiatives that have to do with moving toward a sustainable path, but we don't know how these different initiatives get together at some point so that we know exactly what the game plan is. I'm coming back to the game plan. We cannot measure something if we don't know what it is. In this case, we can audit bits and pieces of things that have to do with sustainability, but as long as we don't have what the sustainability game plan of the federal government is, it will be very hard for us to measure.

You referred to the U.K. The government in the U.K. has developed those indicators, so the basis on which they will measure progress toward sustainability is based on those indicators. As we speak, we don't have such indicators. So for an audit shop like ours to measure progress towards sustainability and report back to you becomes very difficult, because we don't have those indicators that have been identified by the government that it can, itself, measure and that we can also measure.

For me, it always comes back to the same fundamental that is needed for us to do a good job, and for you on your side to do a good oversight job too, which is to know what we are trying to accomplish and what the measurables are so that we can report on progress.

**The Chair:** I have one further question, if I may, with the indulgence of the committee.

It seems you've put your finger on a very important linked observation, and that is that these programs are not only to reduce carbon emissions, but they are also to add economic value to our competitiveness position, the creation of jobs, all of the associated multipliers that are factors that add up to economic prosperity.

I think I'm still not clear—and perhaps the committee is—how we evaluate both, how we know we're on the right course, that the road map, if you will, is correct or if course changes are required. I'm still not clear on that. But I think at least publicly, with this kind of discussion, we're starting to get a little clearer in terms of the methodology we need to develop. There's no question that's what the committee was trying to do in reaching out to the U.K. and getting advice on this.

Mr. Cullen, you wanted to ask a question, and then we'll close.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Yes, a few very quick ones.

Did the government, in these previous plans, promise such indicators? Did they promise such measurements to be incorporated into those plans? Was there some notion, or has it always been the notion that there wouldn't be a measurement of the efficacy of the plan?

• (1650)

**Mr. Neil Maxwell:** Mr. Chair, this is a very important question, because it's one of the areas in which the comitants have been often silent. When we recommended that kind of measurement regime, we said in our report, build the strategy and show how you're going to measure results against it. The response from the government was silent on the latter part.

When I read the response to your own committee's report on climate change, I thought it was quite interesting that the government again was silent on this question of measurement. And I think that is quite typical of the commitments I've seen that have been made, repeated commitments to develop a strategy but not enough attention to that really important area.

It's so useful that we've had this discussion in the last minute or two, because that measurement is so critical. Again, I keep thinking, hopefully, that it's not a matter of reinventing the wheel because there is so much work going on in these other countries to develop indicators.

Mr. Chair, you asked about balancing the economy and the environment. There's been some very interesting work done both internationally, and again, of course, in Canada with the round table's work on indicators of natural capital and the like.

I don't think it's for lack of know-how; it's not for a lack of examples. I think it's just a matter of getting on and doing it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Cullen.

It appears we've reached the magic hour. It's ten to five; it's been a long day. It's been one in which we've appreciated the input you've made once again, Madam Gélinas and Mr. Maxwell. Thank you very much for appearing.

The committee will be having officials next week. I suggest that questions attempting to probe deeper into the matter of evaluation would be well put to officials. Perhaps we'll get a better feel for the manner in which they are going to approach the issue—not only the

broader strategy framework, but the specific measurement tools. I think that's where we're moving to.

Mr. Jean.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Mr. Tonks, Mr. Richardson mentioned in passing that we on the opposition side should give you thanks for your professionalism, for the ability you've shown and the fairness you've given all of us...and the respect all of us hold for you in running this committee—just in case we don't come back for another meeting.

**The Chair:** I certainly appreciate the compliment, and I'd like to put an optimistic edge on it.

Thank you very much.

And thank you, Madam Gélinas.

**Ms. Johanne Gélinas:** It's a pleasure to work with you, Mr. Chair, and with all the members of the committee.

Thank you very much for your time.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're adjourned.

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