



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

ENVI • NUMBER 020 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, March 10, 2008

—
Chair

Mr. Bob Mills

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Monday, March 10, 2008

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC)): Perhaps we can get started. We are missing a number of members, but we can hear testimony under the rules.

Mr. Godfrey, I don't know how long you plan.... The first hour, of course, is for you and Mr. Park. Perhaps we can make sure we get at least one round in.

Mr. Godfrey, I welcome you to the committee and ask you to begin your presentation, please.

Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and committee members.

It's a somewhat bizarre experience being a witness at one's own committee, particularly as the only Liberal present. So if you see me dashing over there to ask myself questions and then running back to answer to them, I hope you'll understand that it's because we're trying to economize.

I want to thank everybody for the spirit of cooperation and goodwill that has thus far accompanied the presentation of the bill, particularly at second reading, where all but one member—and I'm working on him—voted to bring the bill to committee. I also want to thank all the parties that have been consulted on the bill. We have tried, as you will see, to amend it accordingly.

A particular thanks goes to the work of the David Suzuki Foundation. I really do have to give credit to that organization for its publication entitled *Toward a National Sustainable Development Strategy for Canada*, published in January 2007. I have to admit that it was the major source of inspiration for the bill you have in front of you, although we have made, as you'll see, some significant amendments.

I also want to say I have consulted extensively over the months with both the current commissioner for the environment and his predecessor, and I want to thank them for their views. However, they are not to be held responsible for what you see in front of you.

I've also attempted to build within the bill some fairly deep and fundamental scientific principles, which are referenced in clause 5 on "Sustainable Development Goals". These principles are taken from The Natural Step system conditions to which the other guest, Chad Park, from The Natural Step, will now speak.

Mr. Chad Park (Senior Sustainability Advisor, The Natural Step Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Godfrey, and Chair. It's a

pleasure to be here and to have this opportunity to address the committee.

I am here today to speak to you about the sustainability principles that are in clause 5 of Bill C-474 and about why they are a critical component of the bill.

In my role with The Natural Step I've worked with dozens of organizations that have found these principles helpful in sustainability planning, from municipalities as diverse as Whistler in B.C.; to the town of Olds in Alberta; to the Halifax Regional Municipality in Nova Scotia; to associations, small businesses, and community service organizations, such as the Santropol Roulant in Montreal; and to large corporations such as Alcan, The Co-operators, and Nike.

In each of these organizations and communities I've witnessed first-hand the power of having a rigorous set of scientific sustainability principles that act as a compass to provide direction and structure for sustainability change initiatives.

So I want to address three things in my remarks this afternoon: first, where do the principles come from?; second, why are they important generally?; and third, why are they important specifically for this bill?

Before I begin, though, I want to emphasize the essence of my presentation; that is, if we're going to be strategic about sustainability, we need to know where we're headed. We need to know what success is in terms of sustainability.

Let me start with where the principles come from. In the late 1980s, frustrated by seemingly endless public debates about matters of health and the environment, a network of leading Swedish scientists from a variety of disciplines, led by a cancer researcher, Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt, engaged in a process of trying to articulate a scientific consensus about the requirements for a sustainable society. Rather than debating each of the requirements in detail, they sought a principle-based definition that was broad enough in scope to encompass all the details with a full systems view. They began by focusing on what they could agree on, rather than what they disagreed about.

After more than twenty iterations of the document, the scientists achieved a consensus, and their findings were endorsed by the King of Sweden. They were mailed out to every Swedish household and incorporated into the curriculum of every Swedish school. The not-for-profit organization called The Natural Step, which I'm involved with, emerged as a vehicle to disseminate this material and to work with governments and businesses to incorporate it into their planning and decision-making.

Since then, the scientific work of that first network of scientists has been scrutinized and elaborated upon by a much larger international network of scientists and published in scientific peer-reviewed journals. The sustainability principles have been adopted by thousands of businesses, governments, and not-for-profit organizations as guiding principles for sustainability. And the process of applying them in this wide variety of organizations has helped to further develop the original material into a tangible, concrete planning framework for decision-making for sustainability.

What is it that the scientists agreed on? I'll spare the committee the details of the rigorous science that underlie the principles except to say that it begins with an understanding of the earth as a system and an acknowledgement of fundamental scientific laws.

By recognizing that the sustainability of life on earth is really about the capacity of natural cycles to run forever and that nature was doing just fine with that until relatively recently, the scientists identified three main ways that we as human beings in a modern industrial society disrupt natural cycles to cause the many problems that end up as headlines in our newspapers. So there are three main ways, and I'm just going to go through each of them as they relate to the three principles in clause 5.

First, we dig up substances from the earth's crust—various minerals, oil and gas, and so on—that have taken thousands or millions of years to be deposited. We then use them in our products and processes and then release them into nature. We do this at a faster rate than nature redeposits those substances back into the earth's crust. As a result, they accumulate in natural systems and eventually cause problems if their concentrations get too high. Too much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, mercury in our fish, cadmium in our kidneys, and so on are all examples of that.

•(1535)

From this comes the first sustainability principle, which is mentioned in paragraph 5.(1)(a). Note that the first principle does not say that a sustainable society requires that we not use any material at all from the earth's crust. It does not say that there is no mining in a sustainable society. It does say that whatever materials we use from the earth's crust, we must use them in a way that prevents their accumulation in natural systems. This means using them efficiently and using them in products and processes where they can be recaptured and reused rather than released into the atmosphere, water, or soil.

Second, we combine molecules into new, more complex molecules that nature has never seen before, and we use these complex molecules in products and processes that eventually allow them to be released into natural systems. Because nature has never seen them before, it cannot break them down within its regular

cycles, so they too begin to accumulate. From this comes the second principle, which is noted in paragraph 5(1)(b) in the bill.

Again, note that the second principle does not say that there are no chemicals in a sustainable society; it says that a sustainable society will require that we be efficient in our use of them, and most importantly that we use them in ways that allow them to be captured and reused rather than dispersed into nature, where they can accumulate.

Third, we physically degrade nature's ability to run natural cycles by encroaching into natural areas, overharvesting renewable resources, and eroding nature's ability to process our waste. That leads to the third principle, paragraph 5(1)(c).

All of the downstream effects we know and hear about regularly in the news, like climate change, acid rain, deforestation, depletion of fish stocks, and toxins in our toys that accumulate in our tissues, can be traced back to one or more of these three ecological mechanisms. They are all downstream symptoms of more fundamental problems in how our societies are designed.

Now that I've covered the basic principles, I want to talk briefly about why I think they're important. First, while the sustainability principles are the minimum requirements for a sustainable society, they provide direction for efforts to become more sustainable by actually defining what that means.

Because they are based in rigorous yet simple science that everyone can agree with, they help groups of people within and between organizations overcome their differences to form a common shared goal. Also, in organizations that are striving to be innovative and leaders in their adoption of more sustainable practices and technologies, the principles provide the boundaries within which the innovation process can be focused.

The principles are non-prescriptive. They simply tell us the minimum conditions for sustainability and leave individual organizations, communities, and governments to work out what this means for them in their unique situation. Organizations begin to scrutinize each and every decision, whether they are capital decisions, research and development priorities, education programs and so on, for their ability to bring the organization a step closer to alignment with the principles.

We do not need to, nor could we, reach sustainability with any single action or investment, but we can use the principles to scrutinize our investments and programs for how well they are moving us and how well we're being innovative. Without rigorous principles to provide a solid understanding of success, too many well-intentioned efforts in sustainable development become exercises in describing the status quo or justifying marginal improvements on the status quo.

The leaders of the sustainable development movement, in both the public and private sector, are those who can tap into the creative capacity of their people to bring about transformative innovations that create positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes. The sustainability principles help us know what is ultimately required to achieve this.

Now that I've described the principles and why they're important, I want to leave you with why I believe they're important and relevant to this bill.

First, this is clearly a place where there are widely differing views. In such a context, there's a strong need for a shared language for something so important to our nation's future as sustainability. My sense is that this is vitally important, especially considering that governments will change, politicians will come and go, priorities will shift, but the forces driving the need for sustainable development will only strengthen over time.

• (1540)

Second, we want Canada to be a leader in the coming sustainability wave, capitalizing on the capacity of Canadians to be innovative in sustainable development. My sense is that establishing the parameters for that innovative effort is one of the goals of this bill.

Third, we have heard numerous times from the current and previous commissioners of the environment and sustainable development that the federal departmental sustainable development strategies lack a clear sense of what they're striving for. It is no surprise, then, that they often end up being exercises in eloquently describing the status quo or marginal improvements to it.

Rigorous sustainability principles that can be used to derive tangible goals and metrics are vitally important to be able to monitor progress and to be accountable citizens. Legislation is where principles are described, it's where we lay out our aspirations for justice and the principles that guide our actions. Today I've laid out three basic principles that together describe the underlying causes of all our environmental challenges.

In conclusion, I would like to underscore that addressing each problem one by one, after it becomes a threat, is a terrible way to go about society's business. A national sustainable development act is therefore an ideal place to enshrine a core set of sustainability principles, because they will be fundamental to our success over the long term.

That's all. Thank you.

The Chair: We're at 13 minutes, Mr. Godfrey.

Hon. John Godfrey: I'm going to be quite brief about presenting some of the changes I'm proposing beforehand so that members will understand what they're talking about—not the previous bill.

As Chad has noted, there's been lots of criticism of various departmental sustainable development strategies over the past few years, of which our own parliamentary secretary, Mr. Warawa, has been critical, the green ribbon panel on the future and the current and former commissioners have been critical, and the former environment minister herself was critical.

There was a particular focus on a lack of an overarching national strategy, and as the commissioner will be saying, I hope, in the second hour, reminding us of his own words of last Thursday and Friday, there is a crucial need for some overarching framework for looking at sustainability. Indeed, on Friday a group of 11 NGOs from the environmental world also laid out the need for government to be accountable through measurable objectives, indicators, and progress reporting.

In the original draft of Bill C-474, there were two objectives. One called for the creation of a national sustainable development strategy—and that stays there. The second was for the creation of an independent commissioner for the environment and sustainable development.

Since the bill was first presented, we have heard concerns from Mr. Lukiwski, Mr. Warawa, Mr. Vellacott, Mr. Jean, and the Speaker of the House that the second point, that is to say the establishment of an independent commissioner, would involve the creation of a new office and spending of new money, and it would require royal recommendation and thus was problematic for a private member's bill. Therefore, I have removed that reference, as you will see in the amended draft, which I hope you've all had, *en français et en anglais*. That is to say, we will continue to simply use the existing office of the commissioner, as established by the Auditor General Act, so that no royal recommendation is necessary.

A second issue was raised by the Speaker, Mr. Warawa, and Mr. Jean in that Bill C-474 creates an advisory council but is silent on the question of its remuneration. Again, this calls into question the need for royal recommendation. As a result, in subclause 7(3) of the amended draft, this concern has been met by explicitly stating that the advisory council cannot be compensated.

So the two main concerns of the Speaker and others have been addressed.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Members, and more particularly Mr. Bigras, Mr. Vellacott and Mr. Jean, have brought up another concern, that of the way in which areas of federal and provincial jurisdiction are treated in the bill and in the schedule.

In recognition of this problem, any reference to the provinces has been removed from section 13. Furthermore, new wording is suggested for subsection 5(2) and paragraph 8(2)(a) of the bill, in order to have a portrait of the state of sustainable development at the national level while respecting those areas which fall under provincial jurisdiction as well as the federal government's specific responsibility vis-à-vis its departments and its policies.

It is essential to work with the provinces if we want to achieve sustainable development in Canada. We therefore invite members to propose amendments to sections 5 and 8 with that in mind.

[English]

A final major change, based on criticism from Mr. Jean and confirmed by the current and former commissioners, is that there is a need for division between the development and implementation of a sustainable development monitoring system. Recognizing this, responsibility for development of the monitoring system has been moved to the cabinet secretariat, under paragraph 13(a). This returns the burden of responsibility to the secretariat, with the commissioner responsible for commenting on performance through the reporting process.

In addition to the above, several housekeeping amendments have been suggested to the new draft. For example, we have decided that we don't need to put in a new petitions process; the current process will cover what we need to do. We don't need to have the consequential amendments to the Auditor General Act because we're not changing the role of the commissioner. The commissioner will no longer be required to evaluate whether the draft national sustainable development strategy is likely to meet its target, as this would go beyond the commissioner's role. Instead, he or she will review the strategy and comment as to "whether the targets and implementation strategies are capable of being assessed".

In conclusion, what I'm trying to do is to move Bill C-474, to begin a process to move Canada towards a path of sustainable development. As Mr. Park has indicated, this is not the final word on how to deal with sustainability; this is a means to initiate a new way of government thinking that will inevitably evolve.

Looking at the schedule at the back of the bill, you will see that the aspirational aspects of it are illustrative and evolving. We are nowhere near the goals outlined in the back of the bill. We will undoubtedly have to work hard, in concert with the provinces, to progress in this direction. Canada has an obligation to its children, its environment, its long-term economic vitality, and its international commitments to establish a national sustainable development strategy.

We want to remind ourselves that other countries have done this—Sweden, the U.K., Norway, and Germany—and we've got a great opportunity ahead of us, as well. So our objective is to get going on the right path.

Thank you very much.

• (1550)

The Chair: Good. Thank you, Mr. Godfrey. You're not going to have to do the double run.

And obviously, from your address, Mr. Park, I could easily fit some garbage into that and talk about gasification.

Anyway, we'll go to Mr. Scarpaleggia, please.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I congratulate my colleague Mr. Godfrey on this innovative vehicle for advancing the goal of sustainable development. I had the pleasure of speaking in favour of the bill, but here we have an opportunity to understand the bill even more.

I'd like to ask either Mr. Godfrey or Mr. Park what other countries have instituted such legislation. What has the experience been? What are the challenges? For example, I imagine it's one thing to have indicators and regulated targets on a vast array of environmental issues, but what happens if these are not met? And would these targets only be applicable to the federal bureaucracy, or do they go beyond that? Would they apply to legislation like CEPA, for example? If you could enlighten us, I'd appreciate it.

Hon. John Godfrey: You have a lot of very useful questions there.

One of the things we have to distinguish between is reporting on how the whole country is doing—this idea of a portrait—and understanding that the Government of Canada is not responsible for everything that happens in the country but it is responsible for at least letting the country know how we're doing. That's one aspect on the reporting.

The other aspect is how is the federal government itself doing—that is to say, not only how do federal departments behave, as we've asked them for their sustainable development strategies, but what is the consequence of their policies? I think that's what we've been missing. No one has asked, for example, in the last ten years the Department of Finance to give an account of what its tax breaks for the oil sands have meant for the environment. It's not simply about government operations. It's about the impact of government actions on the whole national picture.

In terms of your question on other countries, there is a very useful document. I'm going to suggest we circulate this—*en français et en anglais*—if we haven't done so, since this was the source of what we're talking about. It is from the David Suzuki Foundation. This document from January 2007 is called *Toward a National Sustainable Development Strategy for Canada*. In that document there are examples given of countries that already have national sustainable development strategies. In fact, Canada is the only country of 19 countries reviewed in a recent evaluation of sustainability planning that does not have an integrated national sustainable development strategy.

For example, the United Kingdom has a single comprehensive strategy and uses a senior government coordinating committee to prepare and implement the strategy. The U.K. coordinates national and regional strategies. Sweden and Denmark also have sectorally integrated strategies that are coordinated by central agencies and with local governments. There are lots of examples out there, many of which are quoted in the Suzuki document.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: How would we coordinate with provincial governments, for example?

Hon. John Godfrey: I think in the way we currently do on a whole variety of things. We have to work with provincial governments in all manner of environmental—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: It's quite problematic. On the oil sands, for example, everyone might agree on an approach, and Alberta would say, "Well, it's none of your business". Or on another issue, Quebec might say that or Ontario might say that.

•(1555)

Hon. John Godfrey: We have to distinguish, first of all, between the ability of the federal government to ask for reports.... For example, we know very accurately what the greenhouse gases are that are being emitted from the oil sands. Through CEPA we know about toxic materials across the country. We have the right to ask for that. We also have the right to regulate certain of those things.

There is sometimes a dispute as to whether you use the tax system or whether you use peace, order, and good government. All I'm saying is that we already, on a variety of environmental files, have a way of working with the provinces. Equivalency agreements would be an example.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: So we could ask provinces, for example, to supply us with information on the extent of their groundwater aquifers. We could ask?

Hon. John Godfrey: Sure.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I have one more question, if I may, Mr. Chair.

It has been said by at least one representative of an NGO, if not more, that your bill would replace the need for an environmental bill of rights. Could you offer some clarification on that?

Hon. John Godfrey: They really are two different approaches. And it may be that if we are successful with this bill, we won't need an environmental bill of rights.

An environmental bill of rights comes from the ground up, essentially, literally. It starts with people and it's a legalistic process based on a kind of rights-based notion of when things are violated, you have the right to ask for clean air or clean water, or whatever else. It's a different kind of mechanism.

If you're driving the process from the top and empowering governments or commanding governments to have policies that are in line with sustainable development, and having those policies reported on and then audited every three years, you may not need to have a bill of rights as well. You could go one way or the other, but I'm not sure you would need to go both ways.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Regan, you have three and a half minutes.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To both of you, what's your vision of what the impact of this bill will be on Canada over the next 20 years? How will Canada look in 20 years as a result of this bill compared to how it would look otherwise?

Mr. Chad Park: For one thing, we will feel a sense of progress toward sustainability. We'll have a sense of and a way to understand whether or not we are making progress. I think that's one of the most important potential impacts of this. I don't think we will say that we have achieved alignment with these fundamental sustainability principles in 20 years; I think it will take longer than that. What we will have is a good sense of where we're trying to get to ultimately

and a way to track progress in that direction. That's probably the most important thing.

I can speak from an example on a municipal scale. We've worked a lot with the municipality of Whistler. They're now saying they want their community to be sustainable by 2060. They have a good understanding of what that's going to require with their energy, water, land use, natural environments, built environment, economy, and so on. They have interim targets for 2020 and a plan called Whistler 2020 that has won awards. Now they can evaluate the capital decisions, the large decisions around the Olympics they're making, and how well they're getting closer to the interim targets and their ultimate vision for their community. I think that same sort of principle could apply in this case, but obviously on a different scale.

Hon. John Godfrey: In their plan the Swedes refer to generational goals: what sort of country do you want to pass on to the next generation? I think that's the sort of frame we ought to be considering, because it's our sense of obligation to our children and our children's children, and the sense of frustration we have when we're not doing that. So that's a time scale; it's not limitless, but it reminds us of what we owe to succeeding generations.

•(1600)

Hon. Geoff Regan: What's my time, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: You have half a minute.

Hon. Geoff Regan: It's delightful to be here with you today. I want to thank Mr. Godfrey in particular for coming today. I thank both witnesses for being here.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

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

I am not opposed to the principle behind the bill put forward by Mr. Godfrey, but I believe that several elements will have to be changed in order for it to allow good relations between the provinces and the federal government. There is, among other things, the schedule that sets out the goals and sub-goals flowing from the bill. There is also mention of municipal waste and recycling rates. Quebec has adopted a waste matter policy, but the Canada knows best attitude would have us believe that if it comes from above, from the federal government, then it is better.

I wonder how a sustainable development strategy involving mainly federal responsibilities could be put in place. And I also wonder why, Mr. Godfrey, you have not integrated strategic environmental assessment, which has been around for over 25 years in the federal government. Furthermore, this is a directive from the Prime Minister which should apply to all departments, be it Transport Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, or Health Canada. As a matter of fact, the latest report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development states that Health Canada does not apply strategic environmental assessment.

Rather than have the Environment Commissioner audit the policies which in principle come under the provinces, why have you not required, as some countries do, that the federal government and departments be bound by the law to carry out such an assessment every time they table a plan, policy or program? We have today been presented with regulatory measures. Have they been subject to strategic environmental assessment? Must all departments comply? It seems to me that it would have been preferable to include in the bill a coercive, compulsory, legislative and regulatory approach, rather than calling upon the Commissioner of the Environment to verify if the provinces are fulfilling the requirements of the bill.

I am not saying that I will be voting against the bill. It provides the following:

(e) Canadian cities should become vibrant, clean, livable, prosperous, safe and sustainable;

I have nothing against that, but as far as I know, towns and cities are creatures of the provinces and not of the federal government. How can we, in a federal bill, tell Canadian cities to become vibrant, clean and prosperous? I am not saying that this should not be accomplished, but is this not already being done in certain provinces where waste matter policies are already in place? It seems to me that there is a jurisdictional problem here.

Hon. John Godfrey: Those are two good questions, Mr. Chairman.

The first one involves the respective responsibilities of the provinces and of the federal government. We have proposed amendments in this regard. We are still at the draft stage, but this would allow for changes at sections 5 and 8. We say, for example, “[...] while recognizing the respective roles and responsibilities of the federal government and the provinces and territories;”.

Obviously, we want to do two things at once. The environment does not recognize borders, be they international, national or municipal. The idea is to work in collaboration with all levels of government while respecting the jurisdiction of the provinces. As a former minister of State responsible for infrastructure and communities, I am very aware of the fact that by virtue of the Constitution cities fall under the responsibility of the provinces. However, the federal government must make the sustainable development of the country's cities and provinces a priority. We must not be going in opposite directions.

In my opinion, we must recognize that what is required is team work involving the provinces, the federal government, the territories, the municipalities and the private sector. The approach for the future must be one of cooperation. It is not possible to separate

responsibilities in certain situations given the fact, for example, that the air we breathe circulates between provinces, crosses over national borders, etc.

●(1605)

Mr. Bernard Bigras: What I understand from your policy is that it is up to Ottawa to set targets.

Hon. John Godfrey: No. What we have proposed, in particular... In the new version that I sent you this morning, we have amended subsection 5(2). It is not very well written, but here is what it says:

5(2) The government of Canada therefore, working with the provinces and territories and recognizing their respective roles and responsibilities, adopts the following goals for Canada with respect to sustainable development:

This is done cooperatively and all the while respecting constitutional jurisdictions. There is no imposition. The federal government can impose nothing in areas falling under provincial jurisdiction, but we must work together.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: With regard to the appropriateness of policies and acts, do you believe that it is the Commissioner of the Environment of Canada who should be verifying and evaluating the effect of the policies, laws and actions of the provinces with regard to these objectives?

In Quebec, there is an environment commissioner. He has a job to do and verifies if the policies implemented by the government of Quebec with regard to sustainable development are fulfilled. The commissioner verifies if the objectives have been reached. I would invite you to read the latest, very critical, report of Mr. Harvey Mead, Quebec commissioner of the environment, a real pioneer. He is very critical of the government.

Do you believe it should be up to the government, to the Commissioner of the Environment of Canada, to ensure that the provinces, following upon their cooperation with the federal government, have reached the objectives set out in the bill?

Hon. John Godfrey: Not at all. What I see is a conversation between the commissioner of Quebec and the federal commissioner, Mr. Thompson, to see if they might set up a system covering the entire country, including the provinces. The auditor general works with her provincial counterparts to examine an entire system, for example that of health care, where there are provincial elements as well as a federal component. It is by working together that we will be able to have an audit system country-wide.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Would you be open to an amendment that would make strategic environmental assessment compulsory, and I am speaking here of the 1994 directive that the departments have refused? I remember a report of the Commissioner of the Environment stating that the Finance Department of Canada was dragging its feet. Would you be prepared to include in your bill an amendment that would make strategic environmental assessments compulsory for all federal government departments?

Hon. John Godfrey: That is a very interesting idea. When it is Mr. Thompson's turn to appear, I would very much like to hear his comments with regard to the failure of that process. We are putting this bill forward out of frustration. The other process has not worked for 25 years. This is why we are tabling another bill, in the hope that things will be better. It could be interesting to hear Mr. Thompson's thoughts.

•(1610)

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Park, you said one of the principles—trying to put two of them together—was that when you take something out of the earth and there's the potential that it will go into the atmosphere, you should try to capture it.

How does the whole notion of carbon sequestration being put out there now fit into the set of principles you've outlined for us here today?

Mr. Chad Park: In theory, I think it's consistent with the first principle. The problem in that case is that we're taking up carbon that has been stored in the earth's crust for a long time, using it, burning it, and it's accumulating in the atmosphere. If we could find a way to capture the carbon, then in theory it would be consistent with that principle.

I think the question then becomes the most cost-effective way of coming into alignment with that principle. That's a different discussion, because you can evaluate different technologies and so on in that context. The important use of the principles is evaluating potential technologies for their potential to bring us into alignment.

I don't think there's any silver bullet, in the sense of one technology that's going to bring our whole energy system into alignment with the first principle, but certainly that would be among the options to consider. Without knowing more about it than we do right now, you could make a case for it being consistent with that principle.

Mr. Tony Martin: Okay.

Mr. Godfrey, I'm new to this—with the weather, Nathan is trying to get back to Ottawa today, as many of us were earlier—but what confidence might we have in this bill, given the track record of government, where we've brought in sustainability plans since the early to mid-1990s, and each time the commissioner of the environment finds us in non-compliance, wags a finger, there's this great hue and cry, and then we go back to doing what we've always done.

In my quick review, it seems you've actually removed some of what might have been put in place to actually.... You need some vehicles to actually challenge those who pollute or those who would not be acting in terms of the sustainability principles.

We've talked about an environmental commissioner. They have one in Ontario. I was part of the government, in the early nineties, that brought that in. Mr. Miller, of North Bay, Ontario, not only has the ability to hear from citizens where things are being done wrong, but to actually lay fines and challenge industry and others who would affect the environment that way.

What's in this bill that would give us any confidence that it won't be another of those feel-good kinds of "we'll put a sustainability act in place" but will not get us where we want to go?

Hon. John Godfrey: What we've tried to do, first of all, is to not go beyond the scope of a private member's bill. That's why we removed the reference to a new independent office, simply because that would create a new budget, which would require expenditures, which we couldn't do. What we've also tried to do is work very closely with the commissioner so he's not responsible for anything in this bill, and with his predecessor, to understand where we've gone wrong previously, and also to understand how we can avoid the kind of vagueness to which you refer, which has been everybody's frustration.

You will want to confirm this when Mr. Thompson's up to bat, but the general advice we got was, first of all, you have to force the responsibility for developing these plans and being held accountable for their monitoring in the first instance to the agencies and the government itself, but you need to take it, as this bill does, to a whole other level. That's why we've proposed this cabinet secretariat, which would provide that coordinating function that has been absent.

Right now, and again you'll want to ask Mr. Thompson this, the current plan has individual departments putting things forward in a fairly haphazard fashion—I think that would be a generous way of describing it. Nobody at the top is responsible for pulling all this together or being held accountable for why they're not getting anywhere. There's no incentive for producing a really good sustainability plan; nothing there would reward a deputy minister who did a great job.

The first principle was not to have passive resistance by government departments—I think I'm being a bit harsh here to the current notion of sustainable development plans—but to say no, we have to have a cabinet committee, a cabinet secretariat that organizes this activity and is responsible for reporting every three years and making sure the individual departments report in a coherent fashion to them every three years and then have all of that, in turn, monitored by the commissioner.

This is an attempt to meet the criticism of why it didn't work the previous time. Again, Mr. Bigras was very forceful in pointing out how easy it is to pass legislation that people ignore, which is really not good, so how can we create a line of responsibility and a set of principles that are tough enough and accountability mechanisms that will force people to do this? They haven't been doing it to date.

•(1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Harvey, so could you let me know when my five minutes are up?

Mr. Park, thank you for being here. I appreciated your testimony, but I'm going to be focusing my questions on Mr. Godfrey.

Mr. Godfrey, thank you for the amendments you've presented to us where you've deleted a number of clauses. I do have a question for you, and it's the relevance of timing.

I read the famous Liberal red book back in 1993.

Hon. John Godfrey: How embarrassing. I wrote part of it.

Mr. Mark Warawa: You were a minister, a well-respected minister within the Chrétien and Martin governments, as was Mr. Reagan, who's also served on this committee.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Reagan's not here.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mark Warawa: Regan—sorry.

Mr. McGuinty was also on the national round table.

This is not a new issue. Yes, the David Suzuki Foundation has provided a good report. We've heard year after year from the commissioner that this has been a long-term problem. From 1993 to now, 15 years later, when I've asked why it didn't happen, please don't say you were just about ready to do that. What kept the previous Liberal governments, both Chrétien and Martin governments, from moving forward on this? Again, I've acknowledged that we support the work you've done. We support it as a government; we support it with some amendments. You've provided a number of amendments already. So why didn't it happen previously?

Hon. John Godfrey: The idea of departments having sustainable development plans that would ultimately be reported on by the commissioner is an idea that goes back roughly ten years. I guess there was an initial period of shakedown. In fact, you might want to direct this to the commissioner when he's up to bat, as to the somewhat unsteady progress over the years. That is to say—and this will not come as a surprise to any one at the table—at times when there's political will and there's focus by a government on a set of objectives, more things are likely to happen. Then there are the times when priorities shift and people back off and they kind of forget about it.

And don't forget the reporting cycle. I think it's usually been a three-year period, as we come around on these and see how the departments are doing. I don't think it can be any faster than that. And again, Mr. Thompson will give you some understanding of why it can't be faster than every three years. So what happens is that if it comes out during an election or when the government's priorities are focused elsewhere, then it doesn't get the attention.

I know that when Mr. Dion was minister, he was very frustrated by these reports, just as Ms. Ambrose was frustrated by the reports and you were frustrated by the reports that this isn't working. But that's why we're putting forward the bill, frankly. It is an attempt to recognize that this hasn't worked and we're trying to find a solution, and we're trying to find it, by the way, in a way in which all of us who believe in transparency and accountability will be happy.

• (1620)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you.

I think what you were saying is that you just didn't sense the political will in the previous governments and you're sensing that in this government. I thank you for that.

I do have a question for you. In clause 14 you said that “the commissioner shall examine this report to...assess the fairness of the information contained in the report...”. I want to get your definition of fairness, because we've heard from the commissioner how important it is that commissioners don't create policy and then do an audit on a policy they've created, because that would be a clear conflict. What do you mean by fairness?

Hon. John Godfrey: We've been actually playing around with this. I don't want to punt everything over to the commissioner, but I think what we're really trying to say here—and fairness may have a rather precise meaning for the commissioner—is that we're really trying to talk about the quality of the information. In other words, it's not like fair play; it's asking whether a reasonable person would be able to establish these conclusions with that quality of information. I think that's what it's about. It's really not an attempt to editorialize on whether this is good policy or not; it's an attempt to understand how good the information is that's contained in the report. Would a reasonable person allow you to come to these conclusions? But again, I think that's a really good question, yet another really good question for Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you, John.

The Chair: Mr. Harvey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Godfrey, it is good to welcome you here as a witness today. I obviously would have much enjoyed being able to discuss not just sustainable development. I would have liked to have learned more about your experience with the Chrétien and Martin governments with regard to the evolution of the situation and the results obtained by your government given the 33% gap vis-à-vis the Kyoto targets for CO₂ emissions.

I will nevertheless try to stay on topic. The aim of sustainable development is to think through the entire life of a product, in other words from its production to its use and then to its recycling, and to its eventual rehabilitation. That is really your position, as former government.

In December, a witness told us that you had granted 91 million tons of credits for HCFC-22, a product that, when it loses its hydrogen molecule, becomes CFC. Not only is it extremely toxic, but it contributes to the destruction of the ozone layer, etc. You nevertheless granted 91 million tons. What did that have to do with sustainable development?

Hon. John Godfrey: Are you talking about coolants?

Mr. Luc Harvey: Yes, it is used in...

Hon. John Godfrey: Are you talking about this in the context of the Kyoto Protocol?

Mr. Luc Harvey: Yes, that had been...

Hon. John Godfrey: It is for Chinese manufacturers, correct?

Mr. Luc Harvey: No, not just them.

Hon. John Godfrey: First of all, I must say that...

Mr. Luc Harvey: It is the Liberal government that granted these 91 million tons in credits.

Hon. John Godfrey: If I remember correctly, the problem with that element is that it is, I do not quite remember, but perhaps 150 times more powerful than CO₂, am I right? These are products that emit very powerful greenhouse gases. We wanted to do all we could to eliminate the use of these elements, these coolants, because they are so strong and so destructive. We attempted, through the Kyoto Protocol, to have them eliminated worldwide. There was obviously the famous plant in China that was producing them, and we paid an awful lot of money for it to be shut down. Politically speaking, it makes sense to eliminate a source of such powerful greenhouse gases. That is perhaps an illustration of Mr. Park's second principle, given that this product does not occur naturally and that nature is incapable of integrating it, absorbing it, etc.

That is about all I am able to say in that regard.

• (1625)

[English]

Mr. Chad Park: If I may,

[Translation]

I could tell you a little story.

[English]

A company in Sweden, called Electrolux, which makes refrigerators, was dealing with this very issue and worked with The Natural Step principles to solve it. They were challenged by pending legislation under which they were going to have to phase out CFCs, for obvious reasons. At that point, the only solution they had and knew was HCFCs, and they were on the verge of making a major corporate investment in that technology.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Harvey: I have more questions to ask.

Audit after audit, the CESD raised serious concerns with regard to departmental sustainable development strategies when your party was in power. In your view, did the government react properly to these concerns?

Hon. John Godfrey: As happens with any government, there were good times and bad times, I admit. I believe that this bill could be used to try any government, anytime, and any minister. The point here is to try and improve the audit system that we had previously, which has nothing to do with the political make-up of a government.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Why did you wait until being in the opposition to table such a bill?

Hon. John Godfrey: I had another portfolio. As I indicated earlier to Mr. Martin, it is Mr. Dion who was minister at the time. He made very serious attempts at improving the sustainable development reporting system. You always need a government and, at the time, Mr. Dion tried to improve the situation for the welfare of Canadian citizens.

[English]

The Chair: Your time is up.

Thank you very much, Mr. Godfrey and Mr. Park, for being here. I think you've introduced a very interesting bill.

We'll now have the interim commissioner of the environment and Mr. Arseneault and Mr. McKenzie.

Let's begin. I believe, Mr. Thompson, that you're going to make a brief statement, and then we'll get to our rounds of questions.

Welcome again.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Ron Thompson (Interim Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, , Office of the Auditor General of Canada): Thank you for inviting me to appear before the Committee today to discuss Bill C-474. With your permission, I will make three brief comments.

First, while I had some concerns about the bill as originally drafted, for the most part, I am satisfied that the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, as presently constituted within the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, would be able to discharge the responsibilities assigned to the Commissioner by the amended wording.

[English]

Second, the responsibilities assigned to the commissioner by the amended version are consistent with the role of our office. Our role is to provide reliable and objective information to help Parliament hold the government to account for its management of environment and sustainable development issues.

Third, I am very pleased that the amended wording would put in place the type of overarching federal framework or plan for sustainable development that we have been recommending for some time, and would require sustainable development strategies of individual entities to demonstrate both compliance with the overarching plan and their contribution to it. This would provide a sense of direction and overall purpose for individual SDSs, which is now lacking.

[Translation]

That concludes my opening statement, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to answer questions that Committee members may have.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Thompson.

Mr. McGuinty, please.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

Gentlemen, it's good to see you again.

Mr. Thompson, last week during the release of your report, your 14 chapters, some of us were there and having a good discussion about the merits of the chapters. I asked you at the time whether or not the kinds of improvements all of us would like to see happen were as a result of a lack of will. And I think you've said both in your press conference and in response to my question that where there's a will, there's a way.

And I put to you a different scenario, which was whether or not the reason we haven't been making the kind of progress we would like to see made is because we have some systemic and structural challenges. Chief among them, as I raised with you last week, is the whole question of whether the three central agencies—Finance Canada, PCO, and Treasury Board—are properly seized with these responsibilities. Can you help us understand if you share my thesis that there may be some systemic and structural challenges?

Can you share your views as to how the act would address this question of having the golf ball sit down—going back to my analogy of last week—particularly at PCO, which is the steering central agency? What's your thinking in terms of what this could do to buttress and support these issues so that they are not being marginalized, punted, sloughed off, and so on?

I don't want to categorize it as if this is all that's been happening. It's not true, of course. But I think all of us would like to see more traction. Could you help us understand?

Mr. Ron Thompson: Thank you, Mr. McGuinty.

There are areas of government activity—and the contaminated sites, chapter 3, which we tabled last week, was a good example—where central agencies have been involved in a rather forceful and so far quite effective way. So to say that central agencies aren't involved is not, I think, quite right.

We also reported last week, and we talked about it last October as well, that two fundamental tools that have been on the books for some time to move E and SD forward are broken. They need to be fixed; they're not working.

I guess what I see this proposed bill doing is putting in place something that is lacking right now. We talked about it last fall. We talked about it again last week. I talk about it every time I get a chance. And that is an overarching federal strategy, an overarching sense or plan of where the federal government wants to go with this file, and then having that backed up, in a practical way, in the departments and agencies of government that are best able to contribute to where the government wants to go.

So in a sense, there's no magic fix in life, I suppose, Mr. McGuinty. But I see this bill, in terms of what it's trying to do, as being a quite positive thing.

• (1635)

Mr. David McGuinty: Over the 20 years of debate around the notion of sustainable development, lots of wonderful theoretical work has been done and some great underpinnings have been produced. The Natural Step is a wonderful initiative. There are half a dozen such efforts or initiatives internationally.

Do you think the bill will really help corral things, Mr. Thompson, not just for your office but for the country, in a meaningful and measurable way? You cannot manage that which you cannot measure, for example. Do you think it will give us the kind of...?

I know that Mr. Godfrey has worked hard to give it the kind of traction, in practical terms, that allows the country to know where it has been, where it is, and where it is intending to get to in a measurable fashion. Do you think that will help?

Mr. Ron Thompson: Yes, I think it will.

I must say, again, I'm a strong believer in this overarching framework or plan that this bill would enshrine in law. But I think it's important, when putting something like that in place, to do it in a practical way, in an iterative way. Even if the overall plan had four or five clearly federal measures to start with, to back those up into departments would be a major step forward. Certainly, the way the bill is drafted now, it seems to me you could start small and over time add to it. That would probably be an approach that might make some sense.

So I think it could have quite an effect, Mr. McGuinty, and I'm very hopeful, if it were put into play, that it would.

Now, it would also give us as the commissioner's group another forum to scream bloody murder, if I can put it that way, if progress isn't being made on this file that concerns everybody in this room. So that's important too.

Mr. David McGuinty: This committee voted in the last Parliament—as you know, it's a sensitive and delicate issue—to make fully independent the Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. You've just alluded to new tools open to you as the commissioner.

Is the act going to impose upon you new responsibilities, even though we have removed from the original draft the whole question of the independence of the commissioner?

Mr. Ron Thompson: Mr. McGuinty, we've had a very good look at this bill as it's been evolving, and have talked to Mr. Godfrey, of course, from time to time. I'm very confident that what we see here in this bill is something that the existing commissioner's group can do. I would go further and say that we are anxious to do it.

The Chair: Mr. Godfrey, three and a half minutes.

Hon. John Godfrey: I don't want to anticipate my friend Monsieur Bigras' question, but you heard what he had to say—we have legislation, it hasn't worked, and why don't you use that legislation. Would you have some comment? I'm sure he may wish to amplify his questions, but I do think it's useful. What are the lessons of history here? What do we take away from this?

This is just to open up the questions, the trailer to the main film.

• (1640)

Mr. Ron Thompson: Let me simply say, Mr. Godfrey, that as with any government initiative—or, I would propose, any draft bill we're looking at—in a very real sense the devil's in the details. It depends what goes in the schedule. It depends what the targets are that are put forward and so on.

If it's developed in too heavy a way initially, for example, with too many requirements to involve too many people in it, one might argue that it might sink under its own weight. However, if one starts in a relatively constructive but nevertheless small and practical way and adds to it over time, one could guard against that happening.

I'm not sure I'm answering the question, Mr. Godfrey, but as I understood Mr. Bigras' interventions a while back, he was concerned about whether or not the federal government here would be mandating municipal behaviour, let alone provincial behaviour.

I guess when I look at this draft bill—and perhaps I'm looking at it incorrectly—I see the measures in the first iteration of this bill, in the annex, as federal government measures. Those are the ones that my office could assess the fairness of. And that's fair enough to do. If they were beyond that, if they were into provincial measures as well as municipal measures, certainly for the next while they'd be very difficult for me or my successor to provide any comment on, because frankly we don't audit these other levels of government.

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I was going to ask the same question as that which my colleague, Mr. Godfrey, put to you.

In your statement, in paragraph 2, you say: “First, while I had some concerns about the bill as originally drafted [...]”

What were those concerns?

[*English*]

Mr. Ron Thompson: Mr. Bigras, the words that I had initially had to do with how broad the scope of the originally proposed bill would be. It seemed to sweep in all levels of government, and I wasn't sure whether the commissioner situated within the Auditor General's office or an independent commissioner could actually deal with all of that, at least not in the initial stages.

I was also concerned that a bill as broadly defined as that might not get off the ground because you'd have to get too many people involved and make too many arrangements up front that it might never get started. So that was one of the areas that worried me a bit. I tended to think it might be perhaps easier to have the bill focus on federal programs and federal measures.

Another issue that came to mind, and I gather it came to mind to colleagues around this table as well, was that there's a fundamental principle in both management and accountability, and that is, that the entity that's running the business—in this case, environmental protection or environmental sustainable development protection—would prepare a report periodically and present that for either assessment or audit or what not. You wouldn't have the auditor or the assessor, on the one hand, prepare a report and then, on the other hand, provide an assessment of whether or not it's fair.

So I've suggested that those two issues—the preparation of a report and the assessment of a report—might be better held by different entities, on the one hand by the government, on the other hand by a commissioner.

So those were two of the issues, Mr. Bigras, that I suggested we maybe could have a look at.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: You are probably aware that Quebec has for a short while now had an environment commissioner who he too produces reports. What role could the report of the Environment

Commissioner of Quebec play under the bill, if it is adopted? What would that contribution be? Would you take that into consideration, given the way the bill is drafted? Would it be for information purposes? Might the reports of the Commissioner of the Environment of Quebec be included in your audit? Would you do it? What contribution would you accept with regard to reports from Quebec if this bill is adopted?

• (1645)

[*English*]

Mr. Ron Thompson: Mr. Bigras, I know the commissioner in Quebec, Harvey Mead, and we've chatted a number of times about issues. He's just getting started, as you know.

Certainly we would be talking about issues regularly as we do our work, but the way this bill, as I understand it, would be introduced initially, the measures in here would be federal government measures. As a consequence, I wouldn't ask Mr. Mead to help me assess the fairness of the federal measures. I'd do that myself. I wouldn't ask him to help me assess the federal measures any more than he would ask me to help him assess the provincial measures.

So there's be a separation initially, for certain, Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: If I understand correctly, in your view, the amendments that Mr. Godfrey provided to us this morning establish a distinction between... You were saying that there were too many people involved under the initial version. You rather wanted to say that there were too many levels of government involved in the initial bill. That is what I want to be absolutely certain of. These are not trick questions. It is to my mind important that these questions be put. Targets will have to be set. I see that recycling rates will be covered. In the schedule at the end of the bill, mention is even made of building sustainable cities. Listed in the concerns in this regard is urban land consumption. That is very broad.

The new version of the bill would therefore, in your opinion, eliminate the problems you had perceived initially. That is my understanding.

[*English*]

Mr. Ron Thompson: If I may, Mr. Chairman, I would like to say two things about that to Mr. Bigras and to the committee.

Make no mistake, what the initial drafters of the bill a while back were after is something that I quite believe in too, as does my office, and that is the concept of a national sustainable development strategy. This set of issues really doesn't have political boundaries, as we know. In the longer term, for sure, one would want to migrate to that. It's just that getting there from the word go might be very difficult.

The other thing I'd say and re-emphasize, Mr. Bigras, as I mentioned a bit ago, is that the devil is in the detail, sir. As I understand it, the measures set out in the appendix, some of them, at least—Mr. Godfrey, are they there?—are for illustration, as opposed to being specific measures that you'd want, necessarily, to go forward with, if I understand it correctly.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: If you are in favour of providing a more legislative approach in view of a sustainable development strategy for Canada, would you be just as open to providing a legislative approach for the instruments of the sustainable development strategy, in other words strategic environmental assessment? Is it not the details that are important, as you were saying? Would strategic environmental assessment not therefore deserve a legislative approach?

[English]

Mr. Ron Thompson: Mr. Bigras, certainly the strategic environmental assessments are being reviewed now, as the government reviews the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, and I would expect that the review would include consideration of whether they should be legislated as opposed to just being put into play through cabinet directive.

I can't really sit here and say to the committee that I think Parliament should pass this law or another law. That's up to you to decide, sir, not for me to comment upon. What I'm commenting on here is a proposal for a specific law, and I don't mind commenting on that. To tell Parliament that you should have a law to take care of SEAs I think would be overstepping what I should be saying.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Very well.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to ascertain if Justice Canada will be appearing with regard to Bill C-474 and if its representatives will be provided with Mr. Godfrey's new amendments, in order for them to be able to comment on the new version of the bill.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Bigras, we'll see if that happens.

Are you finished?

Mr. Lussier, you have a couple of minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Thompson, how much time did you have to react to Mr. Godfrey's amendments?

• (1650)

[English]

Mr. Ron Thompson: Well, Mr. Lussier, I've had quite a little bit, actually. I've been thinking about the Suzuki Foundation proposals for quite a while, since they came out. We looked at them last summer. I had a chat with Mr. Godfrey last summer about that. I had no idea there was going to be a bill coming out of that.

When Mr. Godfrey called and said he was going to put a bill forward, that was fine. He didn't ask me to do anything on it, but then he called—I guess it was in January—and asked whether I would have any difficulty with these other sections if we used the existing commissioner, as constituted under the AG Act. I said that I would be right over to see him. So we've been talking.

I haven't been overly rushed by it. I think we've had good chats. It sounds to me, from the discussion around the table, like many of the

points I raised are points that members of this committee have raised as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lussier: To be more precise, Mr. Thompson, I would like to know for how long you have had Mr. Godfrey's latest version. Did you receive it just this week, or last week, or a month ago?

[English]

Mr. Ron Thompson: Well, it was this morning. Someone, I guess it was Mr. Regan, asked me if I had the final version. I think I do, but I'm not quite sure. At any rate, I have a close to final version, Mr. Lussier.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lussier: Very well, thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being with us again today.

I'm going to use, in a sense, the report that was released last week as a basis for seeing the legitimacy or veracity of this bill. Mr. Godfrey will know that none of this is personal in terms of the concerns or criticisms.

It's around the question of the trust and confidence Canadians can have in any new creation, whether it's a piece of legislation or a structure within government. The question I put to you last week, for the benefit of the committee members who weren't here, was about accountability.

You, as auditors, have gone through the government programs and made criticisms of environmental programs in the past. They have responded by saying, yes, they would make those corrections. You then, last week, released a report on their performance on those commitments, and nine of the fourteen chapters were failures. So Canadians can be forgiven for being wary of a promise when there is no direct accountability.

When you look through this bill, what is the consequence, as it is written, to government if it fails to live up to the standards of any plan released under this type of structure, given the myriad other government commitments that have been made and then broken in this administration and previously?

Mr. Ron Thompson: Certainly there is a section in this bill that talks about consequences. It gets right at that issue, and I was very glad to see it.

Mr. Godfrey, what is the section of the bill that deals with consequences for not following along and implementing the strategies?

At any rate, there is a clause in here that does that, Mr. Cullen. We'll find it in a minute. It was in there this morning.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: There's something about contracts being performance-based.

Mr. Ron Thompson: That's what I was getting at.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let's stay with this for a moment then, because I've seen that type of language written into other pieces of legislation. When looking for direct consequences overall, one of the differences we've seen in the U.K. and other jurisdictions when they have taken an approach similar to this is that people are named in the planning, not just the political heads who are meant to shepherd something through, but those from the public service side of things, from the interdepartmental.... Thus, hopefully—and I think there has been some success to it—there's a feeling that there's some responsibility for failure.

As it is right now—and I'm not looking to you for amendments, but we'll be seeking some—my concern is to actually give that sense across government that not only is this the direction that government seeks and needs to choose, regardless of political stripe in office, but that there are direct and immediate consequences to one's career for failing, for not going across the board and making sure the thing actually happens.

Mr. Ron Thompson: Just imagine that we are sitting here six years down the road. The commissioner has come out with a report on the second one of these strategies and the related departmental or entity strategies. Let's suppose we've found that there were three or four goals set up for the government to accomplish, and these various departments that were supposed to be contributing to those goals did nothing or very little.

I suggest to this table that such a hearing would be quite something. We'd be sitting here with the departmental officials who were obliged by law to contribute to the overall plan and failed to do so. That provides to me a sense of government-wide emphasis, importance, and urgency to the work of the individual department that isn't here now.

• (1655)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Allow me to challenge you on that. Last week we sat at the table upstairs and looked through nine out of fourteen chapters in a report showing government failures. While there was some news to it and comment from the various sides and interests, I can't imagine that anyone out there in civil service land is packing up their desk right now. There are no consequences to a report on failures.

When you walked me through that scenario of imagining us six years from now, my immediate instinct was that we would be having the same conversation. When Mr. Tonks visited our committee some time ago, he said, "Look, you're having the same conversation as when I was here as chair." It was funny, but it was also very discouraging.

Mr. Ron Thompson: Mr. Cullen, thank you for sharpening that point a little bit. Let's not worry about six years down the road; let's worry about next week or three weeks hence. We have fourteen chapters on the table with you right now, and many of them don't tell a very pretty picture.

I was trying to encourage this committee—and I'll encourage other committees to do the same thing—to hold the departments that haven't performed well to account, and hold them to account for

what they're going to do to perform better in the future. Obviously it's the future where this is going to get better, not the past. This committee and other committees of the House that are interested in, concerned with, and legislatively responsible for various departments of the House can really hold departmental officials' feet to the fire for failing to perform in these various areas. That will make a difference in their careers.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You see, I guess this is my question, going back to this particular piece of legislation. I see performance contracts and the like. I believe—and I'll be making petitions to this committee—that we need to strengthen that, because we have called department officials to task and account, and they come and wring their hands and they're properly sorry for what happened. Yet when we seek out accountability, as you would in the private sector, if money had been stolen or product lines had failed or what not, you would want to know who did it. Politicians come and go, but it seems to me that the civil servants have a great vested interest in making sure that this accountability loop to the commitments made by the politicians doesn't actually necessarily deviate.

I'll direct the questioning for a moment towards this, because much of the power is held and the direction is given to the Minister of the Environment under this piece of legislation. It's been my growing suspicion for a while now that as the ministry is constructed in the power dynamic that is Ottawa, it is one of the weak kids on the block, if you will. Is there a need for a higher order to be brought in? Is the Ministry of the Environment powerful enough to actually direct these other ministries to "thou shalt" and all the rest?

Mr. Ron Thompson: Well, Mr. Cullen, it seems to me it would depend on how this bill is implemented. Certainly the bill as presently drafted doesn't just speak to Environment Canada; it deals in Privy Council Office, as you know, and that sort of thing. So I don't think it would just be Environment Canada that would be required to make this work. If it was only Environment Canada, you might worry a bit.

But certainly it can work, I think, the way it's constituted. Perhaps you have amendments, sir, that would make it stronger, but I like the way it's presently constituted.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Your department has looked over previous iterations and previous plans. How much of a concern was fiscal capacity in carrying out those plans throughout and across departments? How much money was brought forward to you as one of the barriers to why something was or wasn't happening?

Mr. Ron Thompson: Mr. Cullen, are you speaking of the sustainable development strategies of individual entities or about the failure to live up to commitments?

• (1700)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The second.

Mr. Ron Thompson: The latter. It was brought up to us a bit—chapter 4 on protected areas. I think I mentioned last week that the department said quite candidly that they simply hadn't allocated enough resources to this. On another occasion, though—chapter 5—we looked at the amount of money that was announced over five, six, or seven years for that purpose—species at risk—and it seemed to be quite generous. Now, whether it all ended up being spent for that purpose I don't know.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Based upon previous experience, it's unlikely. We found with the previous Auditor General report that announcement spending in some cases was quadruple what the actual dispensation was.

The reason I bring it up is it's a broader question and a concern that many have. The implications of a piece of legislation like this in terms of where government will have to spend money and allocate resources can be significant. To achieve some of these goals the number is not known. It can't be known until the government hands down a directive. As the current federal government has been restricting and pulling back more and more of its ability to collect revenue, there's a growing and I think legitimate concern about being able to fiscally face the next challenges that come for the federal government. In a sense, the government is in the position right now of hampering itself quite intentionally to make sure that government becomes smaller and less effective.

As a final question, it seems that as we've gone through the number of plans and iterations from government, time and again, the ambitions are occasionally lofty, sometimes not even lofty, but the follow-through is not. The feeling within the bureaucrats—and we deal with them both here at this table and on other issues—is that there is no immediate impact on requirement.

I would suggest to the committee and to Mr. Godfrey that the one- or two-line references in here to the consequence side of things is not nearly sufficient, considering that the preponderance of evidence has said that it is the consequences and the follow-through that have been the problem. They haven't been the lofty goals. They haven't been the announcements and the ribbon-cutting—that's been well taken care of by the politics. It's been the sense of responsibility by those who are actually going to carry it out.

Mr. Ron Thompson: Mr. Cullen, certainly I couldn't agree more. We said last week and we'll say again that in looking at the chapters we had last week, where progress wasn't satisfactory, for many of them there have been far too many words used and far too little action expended.

One of the things this bill would put in place, obviously, is the overarching plan we've been talking about for quite a little while. But that, in turn, should help a government prioritize when it's going to look at these various issues—many of them that we raised last week—and assign money to fixing them over time, because, clearly, no government could address all these issues at one time with the same intensity. So I think that's another benefit from putting in place some kind of an overall plan, some kind of an overarching strategy.

In terms of following through on commitments made, it's our job to help you do that, and we intend to continue doing that. We'll do it in the strongest possible way. We'll bring to this table, to this committee and other committees, our candid comments on how well

government is performing, in terms of the quality of management it's exercising, and we'll work with you in any way we can to hold people to account who haven't performed well.

As to whether there could be more consequences in the bill, I presume there could, Mr. Cullen. I wouldn't want to comment further on that, other than the fact that we talked last fall about not being able to find, from an audit sense, whether anybody cared whether the SDS process was working well or not. We found the same thing with the SEA process, and it's not a very good state of affairs.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just picking up where Mr. Cullen was talking about penalties, maybe it would be instructive for the committee, if we're going to delve into that, that we should have PSAC appear, to get their opinion on what to do with collective bargaining agreements and civil servants who are in a situation of non-performance or non-compliance. It might be instructive for Mr. Cullen to ask those questions of them.

To our witnesses, thank you for your return to the committee to testify today. Of course, we are looking at Bill C-474. Shall I say it's another opposition bill presented to this committee that's had to have substantial amendments performed on it?

Listening to your testimony, Mr. Thompson, I just want to raise a couple of questions out of curiosity I'd like to satisfy first, and then I'll probably delve into the main line of my questioning. It's about the familiarity with which you've been consulted with respect to the crafting of this legislation.

I just want to establish, for curiosity's sake, whether the Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development has ever been involved in the consultation or the advising on the crafting of legislation. Is that a normal sort of process? Just a comment on that. It's a matter of curiosity for me, I guess.

• (1705)

Mr. Ron Thompson: Mr. Watson, yes, we have, and the Office of the Auditor General has been. We're consulted, sir, when the provisions of a proposed act would affect the work we do. And as I mentioned earlier, this certainly does, so we were consulted in that capacity, and we would be pleased to be consulted any other time in the future under similar circumstances.

What we don't want to do, and won't do, is get involved in proposing legislation, in talking about elements of legislation that don't have anything to do with the work we do, but rather how the government itself is organized, that sort of thing.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Okay. I appreciate the separation in terms of where you should be involved and shouldn't be involved.

Here's just a question further down the line, then, in light of being consulted. How many times were you consulted on the crafting of this particular legislation? Were there any recommendations you made, either in previous reports or in the consultation on the crafting of this bill, that didn't make it into the newly amended thing? In other words, is there some advice you've given that's still left to follow, either in consultation or in reports, that the committee should be looking at or that didn't show up in the amended bill?

Mr. Ron Thompson: Well, Mr. Watson, really, substantively, no. We were consulted, I think three or four times, perhaps—three, I guess—and then we've had phone conversations with some of Mr. Godfrey's colleagues.

All the issues we put on the table are reflected in here. Now, I say again that the devil's in the detail, because once this goes through legislative drafting, if it goes that far and all of that sort of thing, the words will change. From our point of view, in terms of how this bill would impact on us, we'll want to watch it all the way through. But in terms of a moving target and where it is today, this reflects our best advice to Mr. Godfrey.

Mr. Jeff Watson: This brings me to the next question. I'll remind the committee that a review is underway, and a report of that review will be made, I believe, in October of this year. Last year when you appeared before the committee—I think it was in the fall—I believe you stated that you were quite happy that this review of sustainable development practices is being undertaken by the government.

Does this bill prejudice this process in any way, either substantially or not substantially? Is there anything left for the review to turn up? You said you were quite pleased with this particular bill, but I guess I need to know how far your being pleased with it goes. Is there still more for the review to turn up? Are we duplicating efforts here? I just want to get your opinion.

Mr. Ron Thompson: Mr. Watson, no, I don't think it's a duplication. In the review that was started back in, I guess, November last year—I think we tabled at the end of October, so the government committed to doing the review over the current year and then reporting back in October of this year—there were a lot of elements that we were hoping it would include, and this is one of them: looking at the concept of an overarching strategy. We also suggested in our recommendation and in the text surrounding the recommendation that Environment Canada or whoever does the review should also look at other issues, such as rewards and sanctions and that sort of thing.

That group doing the review hasn't been back here yet. I've had one meeting with officials from Environment Canada. We're going to talk, I guess tomorrow, Mr. Mills, but I think somewhere along the line, if I may suggest this—and I hope I'm not being presumptuous in doing so—it would be good, I think, for Environment Canada and the colleagues with whom they're working on this review to come back to this committee and to tell the committee what it's doing. I'd be delighted to be here with you when that's going on.

In an ideal world, having the people doing the review here just as they've finished the planning would be helpful, so that if they're getting off-base in the plan, we'd know and you'd know; secondly, mid-way through the review, to see what they're finding, what's coming out, what's emerging; and then, of course, when the review is

completed, to consult fully with this committee and others on the recommendations they might be making and then have this committee and other committees get behind those recommendations.

I don't think there's any inconsistency; I think they dovetail together quite well. But it's probably time to have Environment Canada and the other colleagues with whom they're working sit down with you to talk about what they're doing.

• (1710)

Mr. Jeff Watson: I appreciate the advice. I'm sure it will be considered by the government.

Moving to some of the specifics in the proposed bill—a question around the regulatory timeframes in clause 10 furnishes one example—in your view, are such regulatory time limits realistic and transparent, or will they trump any good-faith effort at genuine consultation? These are pretty tight regulatory timeframes we're setting here. Is some of the work to fulfill that requirement going to be presumptive and therefore trump any good-faith effort at genuine consultation?

Do you understand where I'm going with this?

Mr. Ron Thompson: I do, yes.

I would hope not, sir, because 120 days is not an inconsequential amount of time for consultation. There are two consultations in this. The other stakeholders, beyond the commissioner's office, would have a lot to be consulted on. We would be consulted solely on whether or not what's in the plan is something whose fairness we could at the end of the day assess—which is fair ball: it keeps us out of policy. I think it should be all right.

In the overall architecture, too, of what's being proposed in this—that you would have every three years a national report supported by entity reports, and that they would integrate one with the other—the timing for it makes a lot of sense. You can argue about what three-year period should be followed and that sort of thing, but I think we should be all right.

You may be referring, sir, to the 30 days.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Yes.

Mr. Ron Thompson: That's a bit tight, but it's probably something that could be looked at.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Actually, the second half of your answer presumed the next question I was going to ask, so you're good on clairvoyance, sir.

Do you have any other suggestions, in terms of amendments, perhaps, that the committee should be considering for this bill?

Mr. Ron Thompson: Not really at this point.

I'm so darned pleased that this bill is being discussed by the committee today, in the sense, as I say, that it puts into a tangible way the kind of overarching plan that we've been calling for over several months. There are many ways to put an overall plan in place, and this is certainly one of them. It's before us, and I think that's a very good thing.

Mr. Jeff Watson: As a closing comment, because my time is up, I want to thank the office for revisiting the areas of concern in the Great Lakes. I think that was something we wanted two years ago—if you recall, we were having dinner. I want to take an opportunity to commend you for revisiting that. Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to start the second round.

The word “fairness” was brought up earlier; I think Mr. Godfrey brought it up. I wonder if we could get on the record how you would define “fairness”.

Mr. Ron Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I think that is an important point to get on the table. When we looked at this initially, there was the concept of “audit” in here. Audit is something we obviously do day in and day out in the Auditor General's office, but it does have certain rigour and strictures that could make the work we would do under this act quite cumbersome.

I suggested that instead of talking about audit we talk about assessment and the assessment of fairness. Let me explain what I mean by that. Let's say there's a measure put in for the government, as a whole, and that there are, say, three or four individual measurements as to success or failure. The fairness concept would have a number of dimensions. First of all, are those three or four measures the right measures in giving a reading as to whether that government initiative is actually succeeding or failing? They may be the wrong measures.

Second, is there a case that these measures are being inconsistently reported every three-year cycle in order to show what the government wants to show rather than what a consistent time series would show? So if you have the right three or four measures, are you reporting them in a consistent way, period after period after period?

All of that folds into the concept of fairness that we had in mind in suggesting that to Mr. Godfrey and colleagues. I think it's probably the best term to use.

• (1715)

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Do you have a question, Mr. Godfrey?

Hon. John Godfrey: Well, I am open to hearing from colleagues, but they are looking studiously in other directions, so let me try something.

Mr. Cullen has certainly raised the question of making sure that people are held accountable for their actions. I want to turn that around a bit. This reflects a conversation we had about helping departments learn. A lot of thought went into the monitoring and reporting language under the rubric of getting departments to state upfront what they hope to achieve and whether they've done so or not. In other words, it's this whole notion of trying to push responsibility back.

Do you want to talk a bit about how this has worked, and maybe give examples, in Parks Canada or the Food Inspection Agency?

Mr. Ron Thompson: I'd be very pleased to talk about that.

I remember one time in another life, with the Office of the Auditor General, I was charged with the responsibility of leading an audit of one of these agency reports—in that case, it was an assessment, not an audit. I was given a draft of this thing. The agency report was designed to show the performance of the agency in meeting its objectives.

I happened to be up in Whitehorse, and I was flying back from Vancouver to Ottawa. I had about five hours, so I pulled out this draft report—it was 95 pages long. I read it across the country. About the time I got to Calgary, I was getting a little suspicious. When I got to Regina, I was getting really suspicious. When I got to Winnipeg, I was getting kind of angry. Because the 95 pages told a good story of this particular agency and what it did, but I couldn't tell from the words used whether what it did was good or bad, because I had no idea what the expectations for that agency were going into the year.

This is not to be critical of that particular agency. It's been a struggle in performance reporting of departments and agencies for a very long time. I think they're getting better, but it isn't the easiest thing to do.

I remember getting off the plane, and the next day I had lunch with the head of the agency. I said, “You know, this was an interesting read in one sense, because I could understand everything you did last year. But the frustration is I don't know whether it was good or bad. I didn't know whether you had a good year or a bad year, and that depends totally on what you say you were expecting to achieve during the year.” He sort of laughed, and said I was right.

In this particular case, the next year, and particularly the year after that, the agency did put expectations in. And I think the report was a lot more relevant, certainly relevant to committees like this.

That's what I'm talking about in terms of expectations, Mr. Godfrey.

Hon. John Godfrey: Do you think we can get at that through this strategy of planning and asking that of individual departments? Would that be part of what we could anticipate?

Mr. Ron Thompson: Mr. Godfrey, I would certainly hope so.

It starts with one or two, or twenty—I don't know how many you can do initially—government-wide targets. You'd want to be as clear and precise as you can be with those. Then you would want a mechanism to back those targets up into the departments that are able to contribute to achieving them. So you would have a series of departmental targets.

I don't see why that couldn't work, sir.

Hon. John Godfrey: Thank you very much.

I'm done, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): If you'd be so kind, Mr. Chair, to cut me off at about four minutes along, I want to pass it to my colleague for roughly the last minute or so.

Mr. Thompson, we appreciate your being here.

I have two quick questions. I'll state my questions right up front, and then you can respond, giving yourself the time you need for both of them.

In this bill, as you well know, there are some legal and constitutional issues around the way powers are structured. In some previous comment or response you did allude to that. Some would suggest it may require some further analysis yet.

First off, I have a question on that. From a legal point of view, have you done some fairly careful analysis of those parts of the bill? Are there other constitutional and jurisdictional issues that you see with the bill? That's my first question.

When you last appeared before our committee, Mr. Thompson, you stated you were reasonably happy with the full review of sustainable development practices that our government has undertaken, which will be reported back in October 2008. The second question simply is this. In your view, is this private member's bill the best way to address sustainable development issues across government?

• (1720)

Mr. Ron Thompson: Thank you very much for those two questions.

In terms of the legal and constitutional aspect, I've tended to look at this bill as focusing only on federal government activity. Under this bill, we would be asked to assess the fairness of performance information being reported about what the federal government is doing.

Now, the act also includes, as Mr. Godfrey mentioned, the state of the environment nationally, which certainly gets at all levels of government, and I suspect beyond that too. Our assessment would not cover that. However, there is a clause, on what we would be required to do in this bill, that says we would be able to make any recommendations or observations on any matter we wish.

Clearly, if there was something in the "state of the environment" material—we would read it, certainly, we wouldn't just disregard it—if there was something in there that was just horrendously misleading, you bet we'd say something. But in terms of it being covered by our formal assessment, it would not be. Okay?

We've had our own legal counsel have a look at this, obviously. You know, we don't go anywhere without our lawyers these days, and I've had some discussions with our own people in the office who are lawyers. And at this point, for this draft, we're okay with this.

In terms of whether this is the best way to strengthen the SDS process, it is one way. It is one element we were hoping would be part of the government's review of the SDS process, but there are other elements that will probably be uncovered by this review, not the least of which would be the rewards and sanctions Mr. Cullen spoke of, and best practices in other countries. We could learn something from other countries, I expect, on how they might or might not do something similar.

So certainly the review by the government of the SDS process would be broader than the overarching framework we're looking at here, but the overarching framework would certainly, I hope, be part of that review.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I'll turn it over to my colleague.

The Chair: Mr. Warawa, go ahead.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you, Chair.

I again want to thank Mr. Thompson for being here today. Your testimony has been much appreciated.

And also, thank you to Mr. Godfrey for presenting this bill. I look forward to working with him on this.

What I'm concerned about, though, is the haste to move forward. I'm actually going to make a motion that we have two more meetings.

I'm thinking of the OECD. They've just released their 2007 report. I think it may be helpful to hear from them and the United Kingdom's department of the environment. Also, we have the Quebec environment minister coming. We have NRTEE coming. We have the Department of Justice coming. To rush through these.... These are all very important witnesses, and we want to allow enough time.

So I'm suggesting that we have two more meetings. I think we're scheduled for our next meeting on April 2 after the break, and then we were going to go into clause-by-clause the following week. I'm asking that we have two more meetings the following week.

That's my motion, that we have two more meetings on Bill C-474.

• (1725)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bigras, and then we'll have Mr. Cullen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I understand the government's attitude, but it seems to me that we could perhaps finish up with our witnesses. We will resolve this matter once the witnesses have left. We have 4 or 5 minutes to go. We could discuss a process that would allow us to organize our future business. If there are no other questions, we could move on to studying future projects. We must decide upon the Committee's future business, but I find my colleague Mr. Warawa's motion somewhat hasty.

[*English*]

The Chair: What the clerk and I were just talking about was the potential that on Wednesday—which I would just introduce to you as an idea—we ask Mr. Thompson to shorten his presentation to an hour and then we allow the second hour on Wednesday to look at where we're going and how we want to get there. That's a possibility.

Mr. Cullen, I'll get to you right away.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The process in the last month or so, as to how the committee has picked its agenda and not....

The Chair: Mr. Thompson, you don't mind our talking about you while you're here, do you?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Be careful. You may regret that, depending on how this conversation goes.

In terms of the way the committee has been going and the calendar of events and how they've been chosen, there hasn't been, I would suggest, enough communication about what's been happening. So sometimes committee members have been blindsided by things. I don't think it's appropriate to move a motion at this moment and to start talking about where things are going.

You've made a suggestion that at the next committee meeting we spend some time looking at the various scenarios and options. I will submit, though, that the simple delaying and filibustering of a bill cannot be supported. It sends a signal to all parties that in order to bump legislation off the calendar, all you need to do is talk the clock out over and over again and jump ahead to other studies and start looking at other things. There was a consequence of government members choosing to waste, in a sense, three committee meetings talking. The consequence will have ripple effects down the line on other things the committee was hoping to get to. I assume that government members understand that, and that the consequences should follow the natural course of events.

If we spend time on Wednesday talking about what makes the most sense in balancing things out and we recoup lost committee time, we would look forward to that conversation.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the comments that have been made. I thought it was a quick and easy motion and a quick and easy vote. I had talked to many of you at the beginning of the committee meeting.

I'm fine with having this discussed next week. We can deal with it later.

I think it's important that we've heard from the commissioner. It's very important that we make sure we have a sustainable development plan and accountability that's effective. I think there is political will in this committee, so let's not rush it. Let's make sure we hear from the witnesses so things are properly critiqued.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I was just going to comment to Mr. Cullen that the response to the bill his party brought forward was not necessarily an indication that all bills are treated that way. Certain other bills maybe have merits that his does not have at all. I think it's presumptuous to assume any patterns here in respect of the treatment of Jack Layton's bill.

The Chair: Does everybody agree with my assessment of what I've suggested? Are we okay?

Mr. Thompson, you've heard the word directly, I guess. We thank you very much for appearing. We look forward to Wednesday, when we can deal with the report. Maybe we can focus on which chapters specifically would be best for us to really dig into and bring in the proper witnesses and so on. Perhaps we can focus on that.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.