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Chair

Mr. John Aldag

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone.

This is our final hearing of our plastic pollution study. I welcome Madame Gladu and Mr. Shields, who are joining us today.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): It's an honour to be with you folks.

The Chair: It's always a pleasure to see you.

To our departmental officials, thank you for coming back. I know we had you here at the beginning of our study. We've had about 10 hours of testimony. Our intention was that as we processed what we heard from witnesses, it would be good to go back to the department with some questions that we might have on federal jurisdiction and what is and isn't possible, and just to try to tidy up some of the other things we've been hearing and to get your thoughts on them.

I understand that you will be making opening statements for up to 10 minutes. With that, I'm happy to turn it over to you to get started, and then we'll get into our questions and answers.

My intention is to go through our two rounds of questions and then see where we're at. We might not need to go any further than that. We'll play it by ear.

We'll go to the department now for opening statements.

Ms. Helen Ryan (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Environmental Protection Branch, Department of the Environment): Thank you.

Good afternoon. I'm pleased to be here with you again.

[Translation]

My name is Helen Ryan, and I am the associate assistant deputy minister of the environmental protection branch at Environment and Climate Change Canada.

[English]

I'm joined today by my colleagues Dany Drouin; Nancy Hamzawi, the assistant deputy minister of our science and technology branch; and Jacinthe Séguin.

[Translation]

I understand the focus of the session today is on the questions you have provided, and I am happy to go over them with you. We have also submitted written responses to your questions.

[English]

In the course of your study, you've heard from many stakeholders along the plastics value chain, as well as from environmental organizations. I think you'll agree that the plastic waste question has many different angles and issues associated with it. I look forward to reading the recommendations that you'll put forward in your upcoming report.

From the testimony you've heard, major themes have included the state of the science regarding plastic and marine litter, commitments under the ocean plastics charter, the role of extended producer responsibility, the potential for national standards and requirements, and the federal government's jurisdictional authority to pursue things such as bans or other regulations for things such as single-use plastics.

With respect to the ocean plastics charter, these commitments are voluntary. The charter is not legally binding, and signatories, who are government and industry partners, are invited to implement the objectives and commitments of the charter within their respective jurisdiction and in their areas of influence. About 20 governments and about 60 industries have signed on to the charter to date.

In support of the charter, Canada committed \$100 million to support the development of plastic waste solutions in developing countries. The commitment includes support for waste management, funding to spark innovation through the G7 innovation challenge to address marine litter, and public-private partnerships through the World Bank's PROBLUE fund and the World Economic Forum's global plastics action partnership.

As mismanaged municipal solid waste in select developing countries accounts for an estimated 50% to 70% of plastics wastes that are entering the world's ocean and needs in the order of U.S. \$5 billion annually to help achieve the ambitious reductions we're targeting, this financial commitment we have put forward remains modest.

You've asked for clarification on the European Union's recent targets on plastic waste and how they compare with the targets set in the the ocean plastics charter. In June 2018, the European Union endorsed the EU strategy for plastics in a circular economy. The strategy includes targets for design of products and packaging for reuse and recyclability, and improving the uptake of recycled content in new products.

• (1535)

[Translation]

The European Union ecodesign directive also sets out rules and requirements for environmental performance of products, many of which include plastics.

[English]

More recently, the consideration of a single-use plastics directive intends to target specific products designated as major contributors to marine litter in the EU context. The ocean plastics charter takes a comprehensive approach rather than focusing on specific products, committing to targets for both single-use and durable plastics.

The commitments made by the EU do not surpass the commitments made in the charter, as their scope is slightly different. However, the legal nature of the EU plastics directive can help to ensure stricter compliance by countries to help meet their targets.

[Translation]

As we work with our provincial and territorial counterparts in the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, actions by other jurisdictions are references to inform federal actions.

[English]

Regarding the commitment of the provinces and territories under the 2009 Canada-wide action plan for extended producer responsibility—EPR—the provinces and territories have made uneven progress in implementing phase 1 and have not moved beyond limited measures for the plastic products covered under phase 2. This means that the biggest source of plastic waste, which is packaging, is subject to some form of recycling program under EPR in only five provinces, with B.C. being the only jurisdiction coming close to offering recycling for a broad number of plastic packaging products.

However, it should be noted that nearly all provinces have a deposit return system for plastic drink bottles, which results in about 70% recovery of these bottles nationally.

[Translation]

We have provided a table with our written responses that gives more detail on the programs offered by the different provinces and territories.

You also asked us about options for federal regulation of plastic products in the context of single-use plastics, EPR programs, recycling targets, or deposit-return schemes.

[English]

The federal government first needs to access appropriate regulatory powers to do this. To gain this access, plastics, or a subset of plastics, must be added to schedule 1, which is our list of toxic substances under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

Regulatory measures under CEPA could then be proposed where the science warrants action because of the harmful effects on the environment or danger to human health.

ECCC has used voluntary environmental performance agreements with industry sectors to achieve release targets or meet environmental quality objectives in other areas. These require negotiations with industry sectors to complete. They are non-binding, but they could be options for a variety of other products containing plastic, such as durable goods.

So we have flexibility in the tools available to us, both our regulatory ones—if we add an element of plastics to our list of toxic substances—and our voluntary ones.

[Translation]

Some provinces, such as P.E.I., and municipalities, such as Victoria, B.C., are breaking ground by using their authorities to ban plastic bags, takeout containers, and some single-use products.

[English]

I hope this information is useful to the committee, and I'd be happy to answer any further questions you may have.

Thank you again for your contribution to our understanding of plastic waste and the options for its management in Canada.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for those opening comments.

Committee members, everybody should have seen the responses to our questions that we received from the department. They were circulated previously in both official languages. Those are out there for our information as well.

We'll go into our questions and answers now, with Mike Bossio for the first six minutes of questions.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Thank you all so much for being here once again. You've been regulars at the environment committee overall, and we're very appreciative of the testimony and your helping us to better understand how we can reduce the amount of plastic in our environment and the contamination being caused by it. As we've heard from so much testimony, only 9% of our plastics are making it to recycling. We have to do better. Nine per cent just doesn't cut it, and we're seeing the impacts of that globally.

We just finished Earth Day collections last weekend and the weekend before in many different municipalities, and the vast majority of waste seen in the ditches in our rural communities is plastic. It disgusts people.

We've heard different testimony on regulating plastic. If I understand correctly, you recommend putting plastic under schedule 1 of CEPA. Could we then take a number of different measures, such as regulating recyclability and banning toxic plastics such as PVC and polystyrene and the like, as well as other single-use plastics? Could we take it as far as banning the landfilling of plastic to help enforce recyclability, putting a moratorium on it so that all plastics are created recyclable and then ensuring that all plastics are collected for recycling?

I'm just wondering how far you feel the authority of the federal level of government goes to take national actions on plastic pollution. Can we go this far under CEPA?

• (1540)

Ms. Helen Ryan: In terms of accessing our CEPA authorities, it's important that we first conclude an assessment that identifies what the nature of the risk is. Based on that, we can take the appropriate action that's warranted to help manage those risks to the environment or to human health. As I mentioned, access to these authorities is gained by adding the substances to schedule 1, which is our list of toxic substances. The regulatory measures under CEPA that could be proposed would have to be aligned, as I mentioned, with what's been identified in terms of the areas that warrant action because of their harmful effects. Provinces such as P.E.I. and municipalities such as Victoria have used their regulatory authorities to ban single-use plastic bags, for instance. P.E.I. has passed the Plastic Bag Reduction Act, and Victoria applies a by-law through its powers to regulate business transactions.

In terms of the federal government, we have a variety of measures that we can use depending on what the nature of the risk is. That needs to be determined based on the conclusion of the assessment.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Once again, if we find that once it's under schedule 1, and we've done all of those assessments to determine its toxicity and the impacts on the environment, is it possible...?

We heard Dr. Liboiron from Newfoundland, and then another doctor whose name I can't remember, talking about how plastic acts like a sponge in the environment by drawing other toxic chemicals surrounding it into itself, thereby further contaminating the environment with that sponge effect. Then it breaks down and is consumed by different aquatic species, etc.

Under those authorities, is there anything that would limit the federal government's ability to take actions such as recyclability, harmonization, EPR, banning certain substances, banning landfilling? Is there anything that would be a barrier to the federal government's taking action to that extent?

Ms. Helen Ryan: By adding a substance to the toxic substances list it enables a wide range of regulatory actions under CEPA. As I mentioned, they do need to be targeted to help get at the issue that warrants action. They can include setting targets on the aspects of the substance through its life cycle, from the research and development stage through to manufacturing, use, storage, export, transport and disposal. This could include a total, partial or conditional ban on the

manufacturing, use, processing, sale, offering for sale, import or export of a plastic substance or products that contain that substance.

Mr. Mike Bossio: So it's a tentative yes, depending upon the analyses and assessments that are done on the different forms of plastic and their levels of measured toxicity?

• (1545)

Ms. Helen Ryan: CEPA provides us with a wide variety of tools that can be used. I've covered the spectrum of what they could be used for. Depending on what the assessment concludes in terms of the nature of the action that's warranted, you can then target it in response to that.

Since we've not yet concluded the assessment, I'm not in a position to be more specific.

Mr. Mike Bossio: I have just one addendum to that. If Europe has already made those assessments and labelled these substances toxic, can we use those assessments that have already been generated in other jurisdictions?

Ms. Helen Ryan: I'll turn that question over to my colleague Nancy.

The Chair: Again, we're out of time, but I'll let you answer quickly because we do have some time.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Nancy Hamzawi (Assistant Deputy Minister, Science and Technology Branch, Department of the Environment): As in the case for microbeads, we can do a state of the science and pull from the best available knowledge globally. It will help us in terms of fast-tracking in that scenario.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Thank you all so much for being here.

The Chair: Monsieur Godin, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here. We are seeing each other more regularly and are going to become neighbours, if not friends. We are going to build relationships. Let's stop here for now and see how things go from there.

Some witnesses have told members of this committee that there is a problem. Everyone around the table here agrees that plastic is a problem. I understood from your presentation, Ms. Ryan, that there is a jurisdictional problem, but I think the problem is bigger than that.

Plastics must be a priority, and not just at the territorial, provincial and national level. We must look at this major problem in a global way. Canada, from east to west, collects a lot of plastic that it does not control. It's people from other countries who are polluting the planet. We must go beyond provincial and federal regulations.

What is the best advice you could give to us legislators so that there are concrete results? What would allow us to measure the results so that, at last, we can begin to have the hope of cleaning our planet of plastic?

Ms. Helen Ryan: Thank you for your question.

The problems of plastic waste affect us all. I wouldn't say it's a jurisdictional problem, but rather that municipalities, provinces, territories, the federal government, countries, industry and consumers must contribute and each have a role to play.

Initiatives have been taken internationally as part of the ocean plastics charter. Several countries are joining us in meeting this challenge, and it will require concerted action by all countries.

[English]

We're just coming out of a triple-COP meeting, and at the Basel Convention we worked together with other countries to put forward amendments that were agreed to, with the addition of taking action to strengthen the control of the transboundary movement of certain plastic waste. We've all collectively and internationally agreed to this. I think it's those kinds of collective action and domestic action that are happening. It's the action by individuals, both at home and abroad, that's going to help us resolve this issue and achieve the targets we're looking for of zero plastic waste.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: In your presentation, you said that the ocean plastics charter is not legally binding. But if we don't set binding rules or guidelines in order to achieve a specific objective, with human beings the way they are, it is easy to put off dealing with the problem.

In the various forums, all environmentalists in Canada are alarmist. The provinces, territories, municipalities and countries agree that there is a problem and intend to take action to address it. Canada is investing \$100 million internationally, but it is agreed that this amount will have a minimal impact. I don't believe that Canada is taking a leadership role and is not demonstrating through its actions that it wants concrete results.

We have heard testimony throughout our study on plastics that there is a recycling problem. The municipalities all have good intentions, but they haven't established any standards. Companies that can recycle plastic have difficulty finding it. They don't have enough and have to buy it abroad. There is a problem.

Where do we start in order to address this issue of reducing plastic? I know it's a really big question, a killer question, but we are going to kill plastic, not ourselves.

• (1550)

Ms. Helen Ryan: Thank you for your question.

I'll come back to my answer. It's really by working together at all levels that we'll solve this problem.

Last November, we established a pan-Canadian strategy. We are working with the provinces and territories to develop a waste reduction action plan, which includes measures focused on recycling and waste management. The first phase of the action plan will be proposed to the minister in June. These are the kinds of measures we

need to put in place, in addition to all the other measures I have mentioned to you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Drouin, briefly.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Drouin (Acting Executive Director, Plastics Initiative, International Affairs Branch, Department of the Environment): With regard to the ocean plastics charter, there are two ways to take voluntary action. The charter is more in line with international agreements, in that it sets objectives to be achieved within a given period of time and indicates with whom we can work. For instance, we can work with industry to ensure that, by 2030, 100% of products are recyclable and reusable or that 55% of plastic is recycled by 2030, and 100% by 2040.

This type of approach allows members to have a better idea of what they are signing and with what they are committing. It also allows them to show the public that they support the charter. That's why many developing countries are interested in the charter.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Stetski, for six minutes.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Thank you, and it's good to see some familiar faces.

My first question will be pretty specific. You may need to get back to me on it. On June 7, 2018, we heard that Environmental Defence submitted a request for single-use plastics to be added to the priority substance list, which of course is a first step in assessing whether a substance is toxic. That was about 11 months ago.

There's a 90 day statutory time frame for the minister to respond, which has long passed. It's clear that single-use plastics are having a serious impact on the environment. Can you explain why this request has not been responded almost 11 months later? If not, you can get back to us.

Ms. Nancy Hamzawi: To that particular request, the minister did provide a response, and I believe Environmental Defence provided that to you as part of its evidence. From listening to their testimony, they did note that an interim response had been provided. There's no requirement for a decision within 90 days; there is a requirement for a response. That response noted the fact that further science is required.

For example, you heard from Chelsea Rochman that she had participated in a science symposium in November 2018 that we hosted alongside our colleagues at Health Canada. We also had a best brains exchange to bring together the best available expertise from around the world to identify where there are potential gaps and areas of focus in order to help us in identifying where we need to focus more research and in getting a very clear sense of the state of science.

A significant milestone in that process was the symposium and the best brains exchange. We are continuing to work on that. In my previous testimony, I did note that we're hoping to have the research agenda ready by June, so we're making good progress.

• (1555)

Mr. Wayne Stetski: We heard from several witnesses that getting plastics listed under CEPA would probably be the quickest way to move forward. Would you have something by June?

Ms. Nancy Hamzawi: That would be the research agenda for June. What would be required for listing on schedule 1 would be a full risk assessment. The very clear message from the best brains exchange and the science symposium is that there are significant gaps in research. We are looking at making sure we have the most robust science assessment and that we take the appropriate regulatory steps.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: How far away might we be from getting plastics actually listed under CEPA, timewise? Are we months away? Are we years away?

Ms. Nancy Hamzawi: Well, the specific request from Environmental Defence was a listing on the priority substance list. Essentially, if the minister would proceed with doing that, the first step to put it forward would be a science assessment that would take up to five years. That's what a PSL listing would do.

Schedule 1 is different. It can be shorter than the PSL.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Can the committee's recommendations help to speed that process up?

Ms. Nancy Hamzawi: It's our understanding that a schedule 1 listing would be more efficient than a PSL listing.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Related to that, I'm trying to understand the relationship between free trade agreements.

I asked several witnesses in the industry if they knew what percentage of plastics in Canada come from outside the country initially, and nobody could answer that question. There are so many different products, of course, that include plastics of different kinds.

What would be the relationship between getting plastics listed under CEPA, and free trade agreements and bringing plastics in from other countries, if any?

Ms. Helen Ryan: Putting something on the list of toxic substances is what allows us to gain access to our authorities under CEPA. Then, from there, we need to undertake the development of the risk management measure that targets the risk.

For instance, if you're talking about products that are coming from abroad, when we're looking at assessing the nature of the risk and what targeted action is warranted, in undertaking that assessment, we look at those issues in terms of the origin of the material, the nature of the risk that it poses and so on. That information is then used to help inform the design and development of the targeted risk management measure. It's also used in the analysis that's needed to support putting forward a regulation, for instance, where we have to complete a regulatory impact assessment. We have to assess the implications of moving to take action.

That's how those kinds of things would be taken into account in a decision to take some specific action.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: If it's listed under CEPA, then it could or would ultimately influence the kinds of plastics that are allowed into Canada. As you know, there are many, many different kinds of plastics, and some are of more concern than others.

Ms. Helen Ryan: Depending on the nature of the risk management measure that's put in place, it could.

Remember I had mentioned the kinds of things that we have the authority to look at under CEPA. You can look at imports, exports. Depending on the nature of the measure that's needed, it could have an impact of that nature potentially.

The Chair: Do you have one more quick question?

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Yesterday I took a bike ride over into Quebec. The flooding that's going on there is tragic. All along the way, it was tragic, with all of the flooded areas and plastics floating everywhere in that water.

Obviously, we need to work on changing behaviours. Here I'm wondering whether you see a role for the federal government in just helping people. I mean, giving it some monetary value is helpful, but also from a societal perspective, reducing littering and getting people to act differently, is there a role for the federal government around that?

• (1600)

Ms. Helen Ryan: I'll turn to my colleague, Jacinthe, to provide some details of the kinds of support the federal government has been giving in this area. We have a number of grants and contributions with other parties that are engaged in this.

I'll leave it to Jacinthe.

Ms. Jacinthe Seguin (Director, Plastics Initiative, Environmental Protection Branch, Department of the Environment): This year, in support of the agenda, we carved out some of our resources to do exactly that, to support community action and to also support some third party organizations that are going to do education around a number of issues related to plastic waste. We have up to about seven organizations across the country that are doing quite a range of work. There are some up north, some at the community level, some are NGOs: Ocean Literacy, for example. There's quite a range. You'll probably hear about their launch of some of those programs in the coming weeks.

The other thing, as well, is that our EcoAction program issued a call for proposal earlier this year—December or January—so we have another call going out for projects that are going to be community-based. They're going to be leveraged projects. Those should be announced during the course of the year.

There's a certain amount.... We have a big country with a lot of communities, so we can't get to everyone. However, we're trying to build as well from the grassroots up.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Amos, you have six minutes.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you to our witnesses.

I'm very glad to hear from Ms. Hamzawi that we can expedite our science assessment processes by looking to other jurisdictions and doing summaries. I think that's something that Canadians will like to hear, because they're looking for very fast action on this. They're really not looking for a long, slow and deliberate process. They want good, science-based decisions, but they want them made as expeditiously as possible because they see the gravity of the situation.

I want to go to the specific issue of the ocean plastics charter, which as Ms. Ryan mentioned is non-binding, and compare that to the EU. I've heard it mentioned previously that the EU plastics regulations don't surpass the commitments made in the ocean plastics charter.

Is that a position the department would agree with? My understanding is that it is different and that the EU has in fact taken several measures that go far beyond the ocean plastics charter and that ought to be considered.

Ms. Helen Ryan: I would say that there's not a one-for-one alignment, but the actions the EU has taken go towards supporting the ocean plastics charter. As I mentioned, the charter is non-binding, but its objectives still call on us to take concrete action and to have measurable reductions.

The EU directive is a measure for them to take action in support of the ocean plastics charter. They have a variety of actions that they're looking to take. They have targets and commitments they're making with respect to that.

Mr. William Amos: I do appreciate that. The discussion point that I'm trying to raise here is that we ought not to be focusing so much on the plastics charter commitments. Rather, we ought to be focusing on the highest standards established in other jurisdictions, so that we can confidently tell Canadians, "We're doing everything that we possibly can on this plastics issue."

I'll point out a few examples that I've uncovered with assistance from our team. The EU has indicated that all plastics will be reusable or recyclable by 2030, whereas the charter says that all plastics will be reusable, recyclable or recoverable by 2030. Recoverable means they can incinerate them, which is already 100% possible. That can be done.

For another example, the EU bans at least 10 categories of single-use plastics. There are no bans identified in the charter. The EU identifies specific requirements for recycled content, for example, having 25% recycled plastic in PET bottles by 2025. The ocean plastics charter says, "Working with industry towards increasing recycled content by at least 50% in plastic products where applicable by 2030." The EU indicates there is extended producer responsibility for fishing gear and tobacco filters, but there's nothing on that in the ocean charter.

I'm putting these out there and would be really interested to hear the department's response to these distinctions. I think that Canadians will want to know whether we're going to the highest standard or to a globally negotiated, slightly lower common denominator. Also, of course, you know that industry is heavily involved in the charter.

● (1605)

Ms. Helen Ryan: What I would say is that the ocean charter is a broad statement, with broad commitments that are negotiated internationally. When you then look at the EU directive and the work the EU is doing with its member states, it's a targeted response. They've specified the actions they want to take within Europe that respond to their specific issues, based on their information.

I would put it forward to you in that context.

Mr. William Amos: Okay. Would you consider the EU targets to be science-based?

Ms. Nancy Hamzawi: In developing their directives, the EU's top-10 list of items to ban was based on a review of what was found on beaches. They surveyed 263 beaches across Europe and counted and classified things by what they were—cigarette butts, etc. From their perspective that was enough for them to be able to take action against that top 10 list.

They also had an impact assessment study, but it looked at multiple perspectives, including some science, but primarily socio-economic...and a number of policy measures and various scenarios. The EU has initiated some scientific work to support the directive and is looking at undertaking further work, for example on microplastics, which wasn't captured in the directive, but is number one in the "dirty dozen" you heard about from Peter Ross.

Mr. William Amos: Okay.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: All right, we'll go to Ms. Gladu now for her six minutes.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

One of the difficulties I see with adding plastics to the schedule 1 list is that there are so many different substances: polyethylene, polyethylene terephthalate, polystyrene, nylon, polyesters, rubber, polycarbonate, malonic anhydride—I worked in plastics for a long time—and so in some cases, if you think about polyethylene, there may be some applications of it that you would want to eliminate. We've all seen the pictures of ducks trapped with the little polyethylene rings around them, but on the other hand that plastic is also used for in all of the intravenous tubes and the syringes in hospitals in a lot of medical applications.

Is there a way of putting them in with plastics in a specific application, maybe by doing a similar thing that Europe did when they looked at the different beaches? Have they looked to see the most commonly occurring type of plastic pollution?

Ms. Nancy Hamzawi: If I understand your question correctly, in that scenario you would be looking at a schedule 1 listing of plastic waste versus plastics. I'm not a lawyer, but should our state of science assessment, as we gather information, lead us to that place, then plastic waste, as I understand it, is a potential listing option.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: I think it will be important because with some of the plastics used in cars and different technologies to make them lighter, while you may want to prevent their getting into the oceans, there may be other uses for them that you don't want to prevent.

It's interesting that my colleague mentioned incineration, because I was going to talk about Japan and their use of clean-burning incineration. They don't have a lot of space there for one thing, but another thing in the recycling is that you don't really get 100% of the return. Do you think that putting good incineration technology in place across Canada would help this problem?

• (1610)

Ms. Helen Ryan: Currently some energy from waste happens in Canada. We approach things from the hierarchy of waste generally, so we're trying to make sure that we recover the maximum value and economic opportunity from it. But then there may be circumstances where, because of the nature of the material, there's also a place for energy recovery and to be able to use that.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: When I was growing up there were a lot of publicity campaigns against littering. The culture at the time was that if somebody else saw someone throw something away, there would be outrage. I think we've drifted away from that as a society. Do you think there is a place for a public awareness campaign to encourage correct behaviour to prevent things from getting into the ground and stormwater in the first place?

Ms. Helen Ryan: Yes. One of the targeted areas of the charter, in addition to the national strategy, is education and awareness to ensure that people understand the implications and also to seek their help to clean up the material that's found there. I think from both perspectives this is important.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Has there been a lot of discussion about the alternatives when you take out single-use plastic? If you think about the sandwich bags when people take their lunch and that sort of thing, well, they could use plastic containers, but if you're trying to eliminate all plastic, then maybe that's not helpful. Sometimes there is not a good alternative other than glass, which has its own problems associated with it. Has there been much discussion about what the replacements will be?

Ms. Helen Ryan: Again, that's one of the areas that people are looking at to identify the viable alternatives. In addition, there's been funding put forward for the domestic innovation challenges to look at some of these potential alternatives so that they find their place with the \$12 million invested there.

As an aside, I just came from a colloquium at Université Laval. One of the products that was put forth by a design graduate was a reusable equivalent of a zip lock bag. I think we're seeing innovation in this area and we'll continue to see it. There will continue to be work on what these alternatives can be.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: My other question has to do with municipal and provincial regulations. We have some provinces that have things in place and we have some municipalities that have started, and they're not all aligned in the same direction. When the federal government decides what actions it will take and goes through the listing, how do you see those things falling into line if their regulations were in place before the federal ones?

Ms. Helen Ryan: As I mentioned, we're working with provinces and territories in the development of the action plan to support the Canada-wide strategy on zero plastic waste. In there, we look at the areas of action that are needed across the spectrum, including municipalities, provinces, industries and individuals. I think it's collectively looking at what's needed and then looking to see how we advance that.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Perfect.

Ms. Dzerowicz, over to you.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Thanks so much for coming back. It's been really interesting to listen to all the testimony, and I really like the fact that there have been some recurring themes.

Following up where Mr. Bossio and Ms. Gladu were going, I think one of the top recommendations is adding some sort of plastic to schedule 1 of CEPA, but how do we do it? Do we do it as plastic? Do we do it as a subset of plastic? Do we do it as plastic waste? Like, what is it that we'd make the recommendation on? I wonder if you could provide a little more clarity on this. I'm not a scientist, to be honest, and I want to be as effective as possible, but I don't want to eliminate the use of....

If we classify "plastic", does that mean you can't use medical devices that are plastic if we put that under schedule 1 of CEPA? Or does that just allow us to do testing and various different things where it gives us the option to do a whole bunch of things and doesn't mean we are automatically banning anything? I'm wondering if you could clarify that very quickly.

• (1615)

Ms. Helen Ryan: By adding plastics or a subset of plastics to the list of schedule 1, it allows us to gain access to our CEPA authorities. Our CEPA authorities, as I mentioned, are broad, and can cover essentially the life cycle of the material. Then it's a question of looking at what action is warranted in order to get at the risk that's been identified to the environment or to human health; to develop a risk management measure that's targeted to that; and then specifically to undertake the evaluation with respect to that in terms of putting forward a proposed risk management measure.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Okay. Thank you.

One of the other recommendations was around national standards. I think we heard fairly consistently that it's something we can do at the federal level that would be very helpful. To be clear, are these national standards for what plastic can be created or what plastic can be recycled? What would be a useful recommendation at the federal level for national standards and plastics?

Ms. Helen Ryan: If you look in our Canada-wide strategy on zero plastic waste, you'll see that one of the areas that was identified was the need to have more consistency, and standards is one of the areas that's talked about.

When we talk about those things, we can talk about issues like recycled content and others, and you can set standards working with standard-setting bodies. Standards are often set through a collaborative approach with industry—for instance, the Standards Council of Canada, where they come together and define what's needed. There are opportunities to move forward in that kind of a context. That's just meant to be illustrative. They could also be product standards around how a product is designed, how it is disposed of and whether you're able to repair it, or the durability of it. Those are all kinds of areas where you could have standards.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Okay, that's helpful.

When we're talking about national standards, I know there are different numbers. We could also help to define what those are. They have to be 1, 2, 5 or 7 to be able to be recycled, so we could also establish that at the national level. I'm just throwing those out there. Thank you.

One of the other things that had come up is around measurement, how we start measuring progress and how we measure, I think, different parts of progress. Would there be any recommendations or thoughts around the type of data that would be useful for us to start gathering, so that we can actually start making some progress around reducing plastics pollution?

Ms. Helen Ryan: Some of the information that's come forward from Deloitte's study, in which they started to identify the areas where plastics are used and the nature of the sector, helps to give us a better understanding of the kinds of information that are important to our being able to monitor and measure progress. In addition, Stats Canada does do surveys. They're done roughly every two years, so there's information that's collected and put forward by Stats Canada that also helps us to get a better understanding of the nature of the issue and the areas that we should target.

I'll turn it over to my colleague Jacinthe Seguin to elaborate.

Ms. Jacinthe Seguin: You did very well. It's nearly all covered.

Indeed, Stats Can is really kind of our baseline, and that is who we'll be turning to in order to measure some of the overall progress when we look at how much is disposed and how much is recycled. We're going to be also, hopefully, working with them to try to improve some of the more granular information about what's going on, either in some of the regions or the business-to-business stuff, so we see what's going to landfills and to incinerators. All the recycling that's going on in the economy is really hard for them to track, so that's going to be an important area.

• (1620)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: You don't have any additional data that you feel would be missing that we should be gathering? What is the transparency piece in terms of the reporting requirements that we have right now?

Ms. Jacinthe Seguin: Right now, we don't have any specific reporting requirements. Reporting requirements would be attached to

regulations and we're not specifically regulating plastic waste, but there are a lot of different aspects that are there.

Ms. Helen Ryan: I do think, as part of our Canada-wide strategy on zero plastic waste, one of the areas that will be important will be the monitoring and measurement of progress against the strategy and the action plan that's being put forward. Again, it'll be looking at the targeted actions that ministers agree to and then making sure there's appropriate information, either through data sources like Deloitte and Stats Canada or other sources, which provinces and territories have to make sure we're able to monitor and report.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To be quite frank with you, your testimony gives me the impression that the department has many more than two irons in the fire. In other words, it has a lot of files to manage.

Has the department currently taken the necessary steps? Has it allocated the staff and funds necessary to achieve concrete results, not in the short term, but in the medium term? I feel that you are full of good will, but that you have arms full and are trying to catch up.

Is implementing measures to quickly reduce the use of plastic a priority for the department? If so, this implies that plastic production will decrease and that it will reduce the amount of GHGs. It's a cycle. It's basic, but it's still a reality.

Does the department intend to dedicate the necessary staff and effort to achieve this?

Ms. Helen Ryan: Thank you for the question.

It's a priority for our department and our minister, as indicated in her mandate letter.

[English]

Dealing with putting forward a strategy, working collaboratively with provinces and territories to put in place a Canada-wide strategy on zero plastic waste, is one of the mandate letter's priorities. The department is focusing attention and moving forward on that.

As I mentioned, last November, ministers came together and agreed to the strategy at their CCME meeting. There will be an action plan for the first phase of the strategy put forward to ministers again at their meeting in June.

In addition, there have been a number of targeted activities that have happened internationally in support of the ocean charter commitments, including some very important investments that have been made to support not only innovation but also recycling capacity in other countries, and a strong collaboration to move forward. There is a whole-of-government initiative that's happening. There's work going on with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, for instance, with Treasury Board, in tackling government operations, to mention but a few.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: The will may be there, but do you have the means to achieve your ambitions? Within the department, have you prioritized the staff needed to achieve this objective? My goal isn't to catch you out. I'll give you a very simplistic example. You spoke earlier about the EcoAction community funding program. Is there any money left in that program?

You don't know? The answer isn't important.

I read on the Environment Canada site that the deadline to submit an application to the EcoAction community funding program had been extended to January 16, 2019. It's now May 13, 2019. So it's been three months. I'm wondering how the average person or organizations perceive this. I have a lot of respect for the people who work in the departments. However, it seems to me that you're overwhelmed.

I know my example is simplistic, but have I interpreted the situation correctly? Do you have the means for your ambitions?

•(1625)

Ms. Helen Ryan: You mentioned several things. As for the EcoAction community funding program, it takes place every year. We issue calls for proposals. Bids received are evaluated, and funds are allocated. With respect to bids for plastic waste, several grants and contributions were offered. The proposals have been evaluated.

As I mentioned, the problems related to plastic are a priority for our department and our minister. The strategy was designed in less than a year. Consultations were held with every—

Mr. Joël Godin: I have to interrupt you because my time is limited, Ms. Ryan. I see the little yellow card.

You will understand that, from an external point of view, my reading is that something doesn't follow at the department. Why set a deadline?

When there's no more money, there will be no more money. At that point, the organization will be able to submit a new application next year. That's an example. I don't want to criticize the EcoAction program, but the perception is that there is a lot of goodwill, but do we have the means to achieve our ambitions? I ask the question with a big question mark.

[English]

The Chair: If anybody wants to respond, we're out of time, but I'll take a response.

Ms. Helen Ryan: EcoAction is actually an envelope and people submit proposals, which are then evaluated and the funds are awarded. That's why there are deadlines for the submissions of proposals, and there's an annual call-out for action.

I would reiterate that from a departmental perspective, putting forward actions and putting in place a strategy and an action plan is departmental, and is our minister's priority. Moreover, the work with respect to the Government of Canada as a whole is continuing. For instance, with the directives for federal procurement and putting in place initiatives of that nature, those things are moving forward. As I mentioned, a number of the other initiatives in support of our international commitments have also moved forward. The announce-

ments will be made shortly of the winners of the innovation challenges, for instance. That work is ongoing and is actively occurring.

Ms. Nancy Hamzawi: Can I just add a few sentences?

You don't see this on the website, but there is a dedicated plastics team that didn't exist a year ago. Within Helen's group, there is now a complete task force focused on plastics. Within my own organization of the science and technology branch, I now have two dedicated focal points in two different directorates alongside all of the science that we're undertaking. The department is realigning and focusing its efforts on where the key priorities are.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you.

Mr. Fisher, you have six minutes.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thanks, folks, for being here. It's nice to see you.

We talked about the plastics charter, which is non-binding, but everyone who signs on would have the best of intentions. We also talked about CEPA. What I'm curious about is the action in regard to single-use plastic and general plastics action overall. Who does it best? Maybe you can describe to me what they're doing and what they've committed to. Are they taking an approach of a CEPA or are they taking an approach of a plastics charter?

Ms. Helen Ryan: Your question is, who does it best? I would say there are a variety of actions that get taken, and they get taken in the context of the issues that are important to either the municipality, the province, the country, the industry and others. So there's a variety of actions occurring with respect to single-use plastic, including initiatives that are happening from companies' perspectives where they're showing their own leadership and action with respect to that. I wouldn't say there's one silver bullet solution to how to do this. I think it really is a function of—

•(1630)

Mr. Darren Fisher: But you must be able to suggest that there's a world leader as a country that's really taking serious action on plastics—not a silver bullet per se.

Ms. Helen Ryan: With respect to plastics, a variety of actions are occurring. Depending on the jurisdiction, there may be someone who's very far out in what they're doing, for instance, on single-use plastic. There may be somebody else who's much more progressive in what they're doing with fiscal measures to influence behaviours or with extended producer responsibility. I think there are a variety of areas where we see leadership, and it's not framed necessarily by one individual country.

Mr. Darren Fisher: We talked earlier about the science of other countries and taking that into account. Are there other countries that we're going to school on or watching their science? Are they taking a CEPA-style approach or a charter approach?

Ms. Helen Ryan: Countries are taking a variety of actions via a variety of bodies. When Environment and Climate Change Canada takes action, for instance, we take action under the authorities that we have. Each country has a variety of authorities, so I can't actually give you a like-by-like answer because we don't have a like-by-like analogy. I'm not trying to be difficult; it's just that we approach these things from different perspectives. That is why you will see a variety of approaches.

For instance, in the EU where it's in a directive, the directive is then to the member states. The member states would then move to take their own specific action, and then they would use some of their own targeted authorities. The EU has broader authorities as the EU proper, so then they will use those for the kinds of measures they're going to put out. That's just meant to be illustrative.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Can you tell us a little bit about the science assessment process and how it works? Canadians are seeing whales with bellies full of plastic, and are seeing that as the evidence needed to take action. Maybe you could touch base on this and help us understand exactly how that process works.

Ms. Nancy Hamzawi: Yes, part of the challenge is that public perception is, in many cases, ahead of where the science is. In many cases we don't have a crystal clear answer from a scientific perspective.

With regard to science assessment, in the case of microbeads, for example, where there is some pre-existing information we can do a review of pre-existing information and pull that together. It then is subject to a peer review, to make sure it withstands full scientific scrutiny and holds scientific integrity, and then to public comment. Those would be the key steps in a science assessment process.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Do I have any more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: One minute.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Recognizing that we have limited time left, I'll go back to my question about who does it best. Only one person spoke to that. As a department, do you have something you could submit to us on specific things that different countries or jurisdictions, do? We talked about P.E.I. We talked about Victoria. These would be things that you might want to get on the record. We don't have time today to get into all of it, but if you have something you'd like to submit in a written way, that would be beneficial to this study. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Stetski will get the floor, but before I go to him, I just want to welcome Mr. Shipley to our committee today.

Welcome.

Wayne.

•(1635)

Mr. Wayne Stetski: I have a couple of questions.

First, you said that "In support of the charter, Canada committed \$100 million to support the development of plastic waste solutions in developing countries." I think that is quite admirable.

Are you able to give Canadians a figure, or some kind of number, on what is being put forward for the development of plastic waste solutions in Canada? If not, that might be something you might want

to work towards. We all love seeing focus, and focus means dollars in the end.

Ms. Helen Ryan: What I can say is that there have been some targeted investments made domestically as well. When I talked about the innovation challenges, the domestic challenges, the ones that were put forward domestically represent \$12 million in domestic investment. We'll look to providing further information to you on the financial contributions.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Please do if you could, because in the end, money tells Canadians a lot about how focused we are or aren't on a particular problem. That would be great.

With your being a long-time public servant, I would like to think that the committee is in partnership with you to realize a better future for plastic pollution in Canada, as Canadians want to see it. I just want give you an opportunity, from what you've seen so far, to say if there any other ways we can help you do your job in dealing with plastics, or anything that we've missed along the way. I want to give you the last word.

If I have time, though, the last question will be, what will we do with three billion cigarette filters? Let's deal with this one first.

Ms. Helen Ryan: Thank you for that question.

I think the fact that you're bringing stakeholders together to talk to the issue from a variety of perspectives, and then to reflect on what you're hearing, is very helpful and valuable. As we've heard, this issue requires everyone to come together to work to deal with it in an effective way. Your ability to sit back and think of it from that perspective and then provide some thoughtful insight from where you sit is very helpful and will be very insightful in ensuring that we're putting in place a comprehensive approach for Canada.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Does anybody want to deal with the three billion cigarette butts? Did I get that number right? It was an early—

Ms. Jacinthe Seguin: I just know it's number one on the list.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Yes. It's a serious problem. You just have to step outside to see how much of a problem it is.

If any of you come up with any recommendations or solutions for dealing with cigarette butts, I would love to hear them at some point.

Ms. Helen Ryan: Our colleagues at Health Canada put a focused effort into having people understand the health risks associated with smoking as well. There's a broader issue there that needs to be considered, but we'll think about that part of the issue as well.

The Chair: That takes us to the end of the two rounds of time that we'd scheduled.

We are a bit ahead of schedule. I do want to go into our committee business because there are a few thing that we need to talk about, but does anybody have any last questions? I'm happy to go once around each side if anybody has an unanswered question that we haven't got to yet.

While they're thinking about it, I had a question or a point of clarification. I think Sarah may have raised it before we started.

Question 4 relating to the scale of the ocean plastic problem notes that on average about eight million tonnes of plastic waste enters the oceans from land every year worldwide. Further on, under the same question, it notes that some 150 million tonnes of plastics ends up in the oceans annually.

Those are quite different numbers. I don't know which is the true number or what the sources are. We don't need to know now, unless somebody actually knows what that annual amount is. I was trying to figure out if there was nuance in the material, that if one were perhaps land-based versus rivers-based. What is the magnitude of the problem we're up against?

Ms. Jacinthe Seguin: There are three numbers. The 150 million includes fishing nets, largely. That's the large portion that comes from sea-based or aquatic activities—fishing gear and those kinds of things. It tends to be very heavy, so you go from eight million to 150 million. Then, in the Canadian context, you go from eight million to eight thousand. It's the same “eight” but you drop the million. Sometimes we get it confused, but it's eight million globally from land, and then eight thousand tonnes from land in Canada.

•(1640)

The Chair: It's 150 million tonnes in the oceans globally per year.

Okay. Thank you.

On the Liberal side, did anyone have a last question before we move on?

Martin.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): You may have covered this. You have done a lot of work on it. You talked about a list of the top 10 items collected on beaches.

Is there any idea of the origin of that? Do they do any research on the origin of where it comes from?

Ms. Nancy Hamzawi: The top 10 is an EU number. Peter Ross spoke about the dirty dozen in Canada. In terms of origin, at this point in time, we are not able to draw a straight line between that piece of plastic and its source, but work is being done on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you to the Liberal Party for giving me time to speak. It's most appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a very simple question.

Within your department and across all departments, is there a policy to reduce the use and recovery of plastics?

Ms. Helen Ryan: Thank you for the question.

It's one of the things my colleagues at Public Services and Procurement Canada are working on.

[English]

There are two things. One, we are putting in place a policy within Environment and Climate Change Canada—and we hope to have

that policy in place by the summer—that will deal with the purchases that we make within our department and the nature of the materials we can use, including the use of single-use plastics.

The Government of Canada is also putting in place directives for all of the government operations, including the specifications for our procurement requirements. It is also looking at its building and lease facilities in terms of putting in place requirements there as well.

There has been a commitment made to divert 75% of plastic waste by 2030 from federal government operations, and that's supported by our greening government strategy. There's a commitment as well to eliminate unnecessary use of single-use plastics in government operation events and meetings, and there's specific guidance that is rolling out with respect to that.

Then there are also procurement strategies targeting sustainable procurement, so that we're using our buying power not only to influence what we purchase, but also, then, to influence what others purchase as well. That's going on as well.

The Chair: Wayne, before I go to you, Mr. Fisher had something.

Darren, we'll go quickly to you, and then we will let Wayne conclude.

Mr. Darren Fisher: It will be a short question.

Ms. Seguin, you talked about fishing gear being a major problem. You're probably well aware of the Nova Scotia trial project to deal with abandoned or lost fishing gear. We spoke earlier about sort of “going to school” on other people's science and other's possible trial projects. Do you think that is something that could be looked upon around the world as a success? Are you aware of the Nova Scotia trial project?

Ms. Jacinthe Seguin: I'm not aware, but that's also DFO.

Ms. Helen Ryan: Yes. With respect to that, I would defer to my colleagues at DFO with respect to whether or not they view it to be a success, because they are leading on the issue of ghost fishing gear and other marine sources of plastic pollution.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Stetski.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: I'm just reflecting on some of the quite disturbing testimony we heard from one of the scientists. It was about the fact there are plastics in our drinking water and in our waste water.

As a former mayor, I'm always interested in municipal infrastructure and the cost of improving standards in any way. Municipalities never have enough money to deal with the new regulations that the federal or provincial governments sometimes send their way. I don't know whether we'll get there on plastics. I'm assuming that it would probably be the health people that ultimately might set some of those standards.

This is just a heads-up. If we start talking about getting plastics out of our drinking water and plastics out of our waste water, there's likely a very large cost that could not be borne by municipalities in meeting those standards going forward.

• (1645)

Ms. Helen Ryan: Yes, and those are important considerations.

Again, then, it's about looking at it as we undertake the science assessment to help us determine what the nature of the risk is, the areas we should be targeting for action and then the nature of the action that should be done. We look at issues such as textiles and the plastics that then can be derived from those. We think about what's the best way to approach that. Those are the kinds of issues that we're contemplating and that we're working with provinces and territories around.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: It's not an easy one to deal with, but it could be important for our long-term health.

Ms. Nancy Hamzawi: For sure, and I think that testimony was specifically with respect to microplastics in drinking water, including airborne microplastics. That is an area—both micro and nano—where the science is least definitive, so there's a lot more work to be done there.

That's why we started the work last year through the Canadian G7 presidency by pulling together chief science advisers from all G7

countries. France has taken on that work this year through the Metsä communiqué that came out recently. France will be hosting a follow-up workshop on that. You will note that the EU directive was clear that they were not in a position yet...because, on the science, there's more work to be done there.

The Chair: That ends the data- or information-gathering for this brief study that we've done.

I'd like to thank the departmental officials for the knowledge they've brought to the table and their openness to being here twice during this particular study. It's always a pleasure to see you, and thank you once again.

For the members, I'm going to suspend now for a moment while we clear the room. We're going into a closed session, with the first order of business to be our drafting instructions, per the notice of meeting. Then there's some other committee business that we need to deal with.

So, I'll suspend. But members, please don't leave, and your staff are welcome to stay. Otherwise, everybody else can head off, and thank you so much for being here.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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