



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

ENVI • NUMBER 100 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, March 27, 2018

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Chair

Mrs. Deborah Schulte

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.):
We're going to get started.

Welcome, Ms. Gelfand and Ms. Leach. Thank you very much for joining us today. We're very much looking forward to your presentation. I know we've had it on the agenda for a while to make sure we had time with you. You have a wonderful report.

I will turn the floor over to you because I know that votes will be called and we want to hear from you before the bells start ringing.

Ms. Julie Gelfand (Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Office of the Auditor General):
Absolutely.

Madam Chair, thank you for this opportunity to present our collaborative report on climate change action in Canada, which as tabled in the House of Commons earlier this morning.

Joining me is Kimberley Leach. She's the principal responsible for this project, and let me tell you, this project was complicated. We had auditors general from across the country. We had auditors, staff, internal and external, and Kim did an absolutely fabulous job. I can't say enough about it. Congratulations to her in every way possible.

This report is historic. It is the first time that so many auditors general in Canada have partnered together to assess any issue, and this issue of such national magnitude. Over the last 18 months, each participating provincial office completed an audit of climate change and reported its findings to its legislature. As you know, I did the same at the federal level, delivering my report to Parliament last fall.

The Auditor General of Canada, in his capacity of auditor to the three territorial governments, also provided a climate change report to the legislative assemblies of Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. This is why this report is so historic.

I'd like to present to you this morning the key points that we've raised in this collaborative summary report of all the audits that have been done across the country.

First, I'll give you the good news. The findings from the federal, provincial, and territorial climate change audits confirm that Canada's governments are working on climate change. All governments have agreed that climate change is an important issue and have committed to taking significant action, so Canada is out of the starting gate.

•(1110)

[Translation]

That being said, there's also not so good news. There's still a lot of work to do. Climate change studies have shown that, generally, no government in Canada has fully met its climate change commitments. The majority of those who set greenhouse gas reduction targets are not on track to meet them. In addition, no government is fully prepared to adapt to the impacts of climate change. In other words, Canada still has a lot to do.

As I said, most governments are not on track to meet their greenhouse gas reduction targets. Seven governments have not set an overall reduction target for 2020. Six governments, the federal government, British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador have set a target. Only two of these governments—New Brunswick and Nova Scotia—are on track to reach their targets.

Canada now has a greenhouse gas emission reduction target to reach by 2030. All provinces and territories have stated that they intend to contribute to reaching it. However, only New Brunswick, Ontario, and the Northwest Territories have set a target for 2030. What is more, the federal government does not yet know how it will measure each territory and province's contribution to reaching this new national target.

[English]

The audit work showed that a majority of provinces and territories had developed high-level strategies to reduce emissions, but they lacked detailed timelines, implementation plans, and cost estimates. In addition, many governments did not know if their planned actions would be enough to meet their emission reduction targets or already knew that their planned actions would fall short.

For example, British Columbia issued a climate leadership plan in 2016 that outlined the government's planned actions to reduce emissions, but the plan did not build a clear and measurable pathway to meeting the targets and was missing a clear schedule or detailed information about implementing the mitigation plan. Furthermore, the Northwest Territories' greenhouse gas strategy, which expired in 2015, lacked meaningful emissions targets.

The pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change is intended to provide a national plan to meet Canada's 2030 emission target.

[*Translation*]

The audits also looked at what governments had done to help Canadians prepare for the impacts of a changing climate.

Each government's first obligation is to identify the risks associated with climate change. The report shows that only Nova Scotia had undertaken a detailed, government-wide assessment of these risks.

The audits found some very good practices in specific jurisdictions, such as work that was underway to map flood plains or to address permafrost thawing in the north.

Some governments have undertaken risk assessments for individual communities, sectors, or government departments. For example, in Nunavut in 2017, the government did an assessment of the risks that climate change posed to drinking water in communities. It also completed an assessment of climate change risks to the territory's mining sector, including access roads, airstrips, and tailings or mining waste.

At the federal level, we found that only 5 out of 19 departments that we examined had assessed their climate change risks. As a result of the weaknesses in risk assessments, adaptation strategies often lacked detail. And the federal government, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Northwest Territories had no adaptation strategy or plan at all.

• (1115)

[*English*]

Several audit offices found challenges with coordination between departments. For example, departments that were assigned leadership roles on climate change often did not provide sufficient information, guidance, and training to the rest of the government. This was the case with Environment and Climate Change Canada, federally. In some cases, the lead did not have the authority or sufficient resources to require ministries to take specific action on climate change.

On the issue of reporting, only seven jurisdictions, including the federal government, were regularly informing the public on the status and results of their actions to reduce emissions. Without regular monitoring and reporting on progress, the governments cannot assess if actions are working as intended and Canadians cannot hold governments to account for their commitments.

[*Translation*]

The collaborative report raises questions that legislators and Canadians could consider asking as governments across the country move forward on their climate change commitments. Here are a few of them.

How will governments show that they are capable of reaching their emission reduction targets? How will these actions be funded? Finally, as governments dedicate resources to adaptation measures, how will they ensure that the most pressing risks are being prioritized?

I strongly urge you to have a look at these questions.

[*English*]

Why does this all matter?

First of all, greenhouse gas emissions have yet to go down and the impacts of a changing climate are already being felt. Canadians are experiencing more severe weather, such as more floods, more intense and bigger forest fires, and rising sea levels. Meeting the new 2030 target will require significant efforts and actions on top of what is currently planned or in place.

The pan-Canadian framework is a step in the right direction. It brought together key players to chart a possible way forward. What we now need to see are details and to see the framework implemented.

Madam Chair, we remain hopeful that progress can be achieved. We will continue to audit this very important issue.

This concludes my opening remarks. We'd be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sure there are lots of questions.

We're going to open with Mr. Bossio.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Ms. Gelfand, as always, for being here with us again today. We appreciate your reports.

The pan-Canadian framework was finalized in December 2016. Your audit, I believe, wrapped up in June 2017. We all know that it takes time to turn a commitment in the framework into a regulation, for example. We also know that proper process and planning are important. I have a number of questions that result from that fact.

How much of pan-Canadian framework is included in this audit, and if most of it is not yet part of the audit, how long will it take for the pan-Canadian framework to be reflected in your audit work?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I would say that most of these audits occurred, and that most of the audit time that they took to do the audit fell—

The Chair: Let me just interrupt for a second. The bells are ringing—

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Do we have to vote?

The Chair: No, hold on.

Is it the will of the committee to sit for an additional 15 minutes. We have half-hour bells, and we're right next door.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Could I suggest we sit for 22 minutes? I don't think we need eight minutes to get—

The Chair: Is everybody okay with that?

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Well, only if all parties will get a chance to speak.

The Chair: Yes, that won't be a problem. I'll make sure that happens.

Okay.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In the section “About the report” you will see when all of the various auditors general did their audit work. Much of it was done prior to the pan-Canadian framework; some of it was done post the pan-Canadian framework. You're absolutely right that once you sign a global plan such as the pan-Canadian framework, it will take time.

I would say that generally, if we look across the country, the audit work was done prior to the pan-Canadian framework. A little bit was done post. You will note that Alberta's, for example, was done a good year past the pan-Canadian framework.

Some of it, then, reflects implementation of the pan-Canadian framework, but much of it.... The federal one was mostly done before the pan-Canadian framework was signed.

• (1120)

Mr. Mike Bossio: In general, though, would you agree that before we start to see whether we're going to achieve the 2030 targets, it's going to take a number of years to reflect backwards and say that we're starting to see the results of this or that move now, and yes, it is putting us on a path to meet those targets?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I can't go that far. What I can say is that it will take time to develop the details around the pan-Canadian framework, which are what we would look to see. We obviously have 12 years to reach the 2030 target, but from an auditor's perspective, what we'd like to see is the detailed action plan. How is the pan-Canadian framework going to be implemented? We've provided you with some questions for that.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Just further on that, I think you will agree that there is no one silver bullet that is going to solve the climate change problem. Given the investments we're making in public transit, innovation, green technology, infrastructure in general, in particular water and waste water—you know, \$1.3 billion into protected spaces—do you not think that all of these actions combined are taking us in the right direction to start to see within, hopefully, a three- to five-year timeframe an impact from those kinds of investments?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: What I would say is that dealing with the issue of climate change is clearly complicated. There is no one action that is going to change everything. I cannot at this point give you the assurance that we're heading in the right direction. I would have to audit the activities that have happened since the pan-Canadian framework, and I haven't done that yet.

You asked when you will see it come back in our audit work. I can assure that we will continue to audit climate change action at the federal level. Now, with this historic report being done at the provincial and territorial level, I'm hoping that this will continue as well.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Outstanding. Thank you very much.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have just under two minutes.

Mr. Mike Bossio: I said to Ms. May that I would pass my time over to her.

Please, go ahead.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): I'll take less than two minutes.

I see in the chart that we have up on the wall, conveniently, that the bottom bullet says “Paris target.” I just want to confirm with you that the number you're using for “Paris target” is the current federal target, the 30% below 2005 by 2030. That is not actually consistent with hitting 1.5 degrees. You didn't do a calculation of what we needed to have to actually reach the Paris targets. I just want to confirm that.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: The target that we used is the federal target.

Ms. Elizabeth May: My other point is that I was surprised to see that so few federal departments have actually assessed risks within their portfolios. I think this puts us quite far behind the United States and their Government Accountability Office, which has assessed risks across all departments within the U.S. government.

Could you comment on that at all?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I can't comment on the U.S. situation, but I would say that I was surprised at how few departments had done full, comprehensive assessments of climate change risks within their mandate and their provision of services to Canadians. We found that only five out of 19 departments had done that, which leaves you with 14 federal departments not having done that work. That was a little bit of a surprise for us, as well.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'll stop there in the interest of time.

The Chair: We'll all speed up a bit.

Go ahead, Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, I think that the made-in-Manitoba climate change and green plan was done after your report, but I would recommend that you have a look at it because it's probably the most comprehensive response to climate change in Canada. What I like about that particular plan is that it has a lot of on-the-ground programming built in.

I think Mr. Bossio alluded to the importance of on-the-ground programming, with things like carbon sequestration, land management, and so on.

On page 6, you talked about carbon pricing as the economic mechanism intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, so my assumption is that either a cap-and-trade system or a carbon tax is something that you generally support.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It's not for me to be supportive or not of that.

• (1125)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: What we're providing is information on what governments have done in order to put a price on carbon and there are two different systems.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Right. Well, I still take it to mean that you're probably supportive of a price on carbon, but—

My question is—and I asked the environment minister this and was very disappointed by the answer I didn't get—under the \$50 carbon tax being proposed by this government, and given that your report is all about measure, measure, measure, and how are we doing and how quickly are we getting there.... Well, the “there” is a number, so what I am looking for are numbers and so far I'm not getting them.

Under the \$50 carbon tax, can you give us the number that indicates how much greenhouse gas emissions in Canada will be reduced when that tax is implemented across Canada?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I think that's a wonderful question.

We have not turned our attention to that. It could potentially be something that we could look at in our next audits on this issue. We have not looked at that at this time.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Well, it seems that nobody has, and again, this is casting no aspersions on you or your office, given the role you play. You basically analyze what you're given, and that's the role of your office. However, the fact that there is no number attached to carbon pricing, in terms of reduced emissions, I find absolutely shocking.

In my own career in environmental management, it's a truism that every environmental action or decision should have a measurable environmental result that you can look at and count. In this particular case, in terms of a carbon tax or a carbon price, in terms of an actual number, in terms of reduced emissions, we don't seem to have it. I find that absolutely astonishing.

I will now turn the rest of my time over to Monsieur Godin.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Can I just say something, Mr. Sopuck?

Across the country we found that that we were not aware of how many greenhouse gas emissions were associated with all of the actions taken. So your comment applies to what we found across the country.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

You're next, Mr. Godin.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have just under three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay.

Commissioner, it's always a pleasure to meet you.

You understand that we have skimmed through this report and that it is still fresh in our memory. That being said, I am disappointed to see that not all provinces and territories participated in this report, which discredits it somewhat.

I am an MP from the province of Quebec. Why didn't Quebec participate in this report?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Quebec was a partner in this project. In the wings, the province took part in creating the questions, and we worked as a team. Quebec participated throughout in the work undertaken by Ms. Leach and those behind the scenes.

Mr. Joël Godin: However, we do not have data.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Quebec's Office of the Auditor General decided not to carry out an audit because it had already done some for climate change. For more information, you would have to ask Quebec's Office of the Auditor General. They were partners, but not participants.

Mr. Joël Godin: You spoke about all of Canada. Based on what you said, you have data for all territories and for all provinces, and we can trust these figures, even if some provinces and territories weren't as involved as others.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Quebec was the only province that did not participate in that.

Mr. Joël Godin: You also stated in your presentation that 5 out of 19 federal departments had carried out a climate change risk assessment. That therefore means that 63% of federal departments have not done their job.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In fact, 14 out of 19 federal departments had not done a comprehensive assessment of the risks associated with climate change.

Mr. Joël Godin: That is more than 63%.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That is 14 out of 19 departments.

Mr. Joël Godin: My calculations posited that there were 12 departments out of 19, and so the percentage is even higher. It is somewhat disappointing to see that federal departments are not involved and are not aware. I've already said so, but I found it unfortunate that departments react when a report is tabled, yet do nothing to change subsequently. I am somewhat disappointed. Even if it means repeating myself over and over again, I will double down and convey my message so that one day, we find solutions and have departments that are accountable for their decisions as well as their inaction.

You also stated that Canada still has a lot to do. Here is the million dollar question: are we on the right track?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: At the end of my presentation, I indicated that we have developed the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change. This is one of the best plans that we have had to date to tackle climate change. It brings in every single department and every single province and territory. What we need now are measures to implement this plan.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you.

• (1130)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: It's terrific to have you here again, Commissioner.

Thank you, Madam Leach. What a task. This is historic. We appreciate the effort. You've been pretty clear on where we've gone astray and what needs to happen. I appreciate particularly this report, on the heels of the report you tabled last fall in which you specifically pointed out problems at the federal level.

Is it not true, Madam Commissioner, that it is the federal government that would be held accountable at the international level for meeting the commitments we made at Paris to meet the 1.5 degrees centigrade?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I believe so, yes.

Ms. Linda Duncan: This mechanism of the pan-Canadian framework, then, is a sort of strategy, but it is ultimately the federal government that is going to have to be accountable for what happens.

The trajectory you're showing is not reassuring. It's troubling that each successive government just keeps dispensing with the reduction targets they set. The Conservative government dispensed with the initial targets, the Kyoto targets, and then the Copenhagen targets. Now this government has unilaterally decided that we're not going to meet the 2020 target.

This gives cause for concern, because we have been making these international commitments and then just unilaterally deciding that, oh well, we'll work towards 2030. Is it not true that we are also committed to be reporting on where we are in 2020?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It is my understanding that we are to report on where we are in 2020. In the audit we tabled in the fall, we indicated clearly that the Government of Canada seemed to no longer be talking about 2020 and only talking about the 2030 target, which we indicated was pushing the ball further along the path and rendering the target more difficult. It will be more difficult to reach 500-odd megatonnes than it was to reach the 2020 target.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Thank you.

I'm deeply concerned that the targets are not also reflecting the actual emissions. I give by way of example the concerns being addressed by a lot of technically qualified people that the methane emissions are being grossly under-reported. It may well be that in those jurisdictions where we have substantial methane emissions, particularly from the oil and gas sector, the emissions are going to be substantially greater than what we are reported to be going to reduce.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: In our report, you'll note that there were at least two jurisdictions, maybe three, that had difficulty with the federal emission numbers, and they either used their own numbers or replaced them, or provided additional information to the federal government.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Okay, that is true. I know that Alberta has said it will reduce 40% or something, I think, of methane emissions,

but it's well known that this is based on under-reporting, and it's not even actually monitoring yet.

You raised last fall a really important matter. It goes to your overall issue about accountability.

I and a number of people in Canada have been following what the U.K. and Germany have done. The United Kingdom actually enacted in law its targets. I think that every five years it sets another percentage reduction target. It has established an independent commission, headed by a former Edmontonian, that advises on how to meet the next round of targets, and then audits and publicly reports.

Would you want to speak to whether that kind of mechanism at the federal level might help us better track what is going on federally, and then additionally provincially and territorially?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I believe you're correct about everything you said about the U.K. We found that some provinces had enacted in law their targets, and the New Brunswick auditor general made the recommendation that the targets for New Brunswick should be enacted in law.

I believe it would be the job of parliamentarians to make the call whether or not we need a commission and what it could do. Yes, then, that's a job for parliamentarians to do.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Okay. Thank you.

I will give Mr. Cannings a chance. How many minutes does he have?

The Chair: We're at just under a minute and a half.

Go ahead.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): This may be beyond your remit. I offer my apologies, if it is.

I'm just listening to the conversation here about the pan-Canadian framework. You mentioned that it was one of the best plans we've had, and yet it's a difficult thing in a federation. It's like herding cats, when you have federal goals and then a lot of those are put off onto the provinces.

I don't want you to get into policy or anything, but could you comment broadly on areas where the federal government would best have tackled those types of reductions or taken those actions, rather than putting them onto the provinces?

One example that comes to my mind is the ecoENERGY retrofit program, which was so successful here federally and yet was passed off to the provinces, only a couple of which have picked it up.

• (1135)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Unfortunately, we did not really look at the issue of where it would be best suited. That's a decision the government has to make, and then we audit against their commitment. If the governments suggest that we're going to have cap and trade, then we audit against the cap and trade. We can't audit against something that they haven't set.

Mr. Richard Cannings: So....

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We can't look at that. We can't comment on it, unfortunately.

Mr. Richard Cannings: I was just thinking about whether, after doing all this, you had any ideas about—

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I can say that herding provinces and herding auditors general....

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut it off there, because we have to go to vote.

You've been so kind. Thank you, Commissioner, for offering to stay until 12:30 to accommodate this situation. I think that's true for Ms. Leach as well. We thank you very much. If you could be patient while we go to vote, we'll be back.

I will suspend right now. Thank you.

• _____ (Pause) _____
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 • (1200)

The Chair: We're going to resume.

We're back to questioning, and Mr. Amos was next up.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to Ms. Leach and Commissioner Gelfand. All of the work that has gone into this is much appreciated. I can only imagine what a Herculean task it was to bring together so many provincial and territorial auditors.

I'd like to ask what future there is for more collaboration. It seems to me that this is a fabulous development in accountability and auditing for the country. It's a big country, and we want to know that the best possible work to hold our governments accountable is being done. It would appear that this is really ground-breaking stuff, and I'd love to know what can be done to push the envelope further.

I put that to you now.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Auditors general have an association, the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors. They meet a couple of times a year, both on financial issues and on value-for-money audits.

It was a result of the leadership of the auditors general; they actually asked whether or not we could work on something collaboratively. I don't think anybody expected that we'd get everybody in the tent on such a big piece of work, on climate change.

I think that encouraging auditors general to do more collaboration is something that parliamentarians can do. It would require us to think of new ways of doing things. We aren't actually resourced in that way, properly, to do more collaboration, but I think it is the way of the future.

Auditors general are discussing this, and we can see, particularly in the area of environment and sustainable development, many opportunities to do collaborative work. There could also be collaborative work done on other files—aboriginal peoples, for example, or health care. There's a lot of work that could be done

collaboratively; it's really over to the auditors general, who are all independent agents of parliaments, to make that call.

• (1205)

Mr. William Amos: Thank you for that response. I will simply seize the opportunity, then, to encourage your office to pursue every avenue for future collaboration.

Consider this a call-out to auditors general across the country. Thank you for your work, and please continue to find more and more ways to collaborate. I think it's a great direction.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Thank you.

Mr. William Amos: I'd like to go very quickly, because I have a third question to ask, around the participation of Quebec. I've read the footnotes. I appreciate the rationale underpinning their non-participation in this particular opportunity, but are you optimistic that there will be future opportunities for collaboration with Quebec and that there is an openness on the part of the Quebec auditor general and the commissioner to participate?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Really, you need to ask the Auditor General of Quebec about that. It's very difficult for me to answer that question.

What I can say is that they participated. As a partner they were doing all the background work with us to figure out what the common questions were and how we were going to do this. We talked about their cap-and-trade program. They contributed that to the project.

It seemed very clear that in this case, doing an audit on climate was not good timing for them, but as to the question whether they're open to do other work, really, you need to ask them.

Mr. William Amos: Okay.

In terms of future opportunities for the commissioner's office to engage in that auditing function at an international level, it strikes me that there is an entire international community of auditors, or environmental commissioners, if you will—I'm sure they all have different names in different countries. Many, I presume, are working on issues related to climate change. Can you describe for me the nature of the collaboration that is ongoing and say whether or not there are opportunities for further engagement of yourselves, as our Canadian institution, but also of your colleagues internationally to work, in the context of the conference of the parties, in these international settings in which climate is being considered?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: There's one thing you might be very interested in.

First of all, let me tell you that Canada's commissioner of the environment and sustainable development is the only such commissioner located in the office of an Auditor General—Canada and Quebec. There are other commissioners of environment and sustainable development but they are separate agents of parliaments, or they're called ombudsmen for future generations or ombudsmen for children, etc.

Auditors general, however, are collaborating and you'll hear more about this in April when I table my report on sustainable development goals. The auditors general around the world are collaborating on looking at the SDGs and how well governments are prepared to implement them. They're going to be starting to look around the world at auditing specific SDG targets. They're also going to look at their role in SDG-16 to prevent corruption. Auditors general play a big role in that. We're looking at the SDGs on a global level and our role in them.

Finally, is our engagement and the work of the parties in conference. Right now, we see that as government work. We don't see a role for us right now, but we could always change that, I guess. That would be up to Parliament.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Godin, you're next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Chair, I would like to come back to the subject of Quebec's participation. In your report, you spoke of 12 provinces and territories, but you have not given any data about Quebec. You said that Quebec did contribute, albeit partially. We therefore do not have the full picture regarding that province.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: What I can tell you, is that Quebec was a partner, but that the province did not do a new climate change assessment.

Mr. Joël Godin: All right.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: The Office of the Auditor General of Quebec had just done one, and did not see fit to do another.

Mr. Joël Godin: Since they had just done an assessment, couldn't they give you the data?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: They could not give us data that was too outdated. It was their decision. All auditors general are independent officers of their parliaments, and the decision to participate lies with them.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand Quebec's decision and that the issue falls under Quebec's jurisdiction. I find it unfortunate, nonetheless, that a pan-Canadian report does not include Quebec. Quebec is on its own. Yet the data could have been complementary and helpful in painting an accurate picture of the situation.

Some doubts remain on the realistic nature of the data. I know that you did excellent work, because I am familiar with your expertise, and I know that you are conscientious. It is, however, unfortunate to see that you do not have data for Quebec, which represents 23% of the population, and perhaps a little more in terms of territory.

I would like you to explain something. Exhibit 6 says:

The federal government began to make progress under the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change.

Saying "began to make" is vague and broad. What does that mean exactly? My understanding is that it represents a start.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: As I said, we found that 5 departments out of 19 had done full climate change risk assessments. That is the issue

here. There were 14 departments that did not complete one. They started the work, but they did not complete it.

Mr. Joël Godin: I would like to go back to that. Earlier, I said that 63% of federal departments had not done the work, but in fact, it is 73% of them.

So 73% of federal departments did not do climate change risk assessments. That means that three quarters of all federal departments have not started.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I did not say that they had not started. What I am saying is that they have not completed a full risk assessment.

When I tabled the audit, we found that five departments had done good work.

Mr. Joël Godin: All right.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: The departments were Transport Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and Health Canada. Five departments did very good work. Some departments only examined part of their mandates. The Department of National Defence looked at risks associated with the North, for example, whereas other departments did not assess the risks facing them at all.

The departments that did not do a full, comprehensive assessment of the risks pertaining to their mandates and to the delivery of programs and services to Canadians are part of the 14 departments out of 19.

Mr. Joël Godin: That equals 73%.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It does not mean that those 14 departments did nothing.

Mr. Joël Godin: All right. I see.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: They did some work, but it was not complete and comprehensive.

Mr. Joël Godin: In your presentation, you said that even Environment and Climate Change Canada had unfortunately not led by example. How can we explain the government's ongoing claims that it will now be a green government, that it will establish active practices to be more conscientious and pay more attention to the planet, and that it will adopt measures to achieve better results?

In real terms, the lead department sending out the signal to the other departments, in the federal government, and, I hope, to the provincial governments, is not leading by example. How do you explain that?

• (1215)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: As I told you, in our audit, we found that 14 departments had not conducted a full assessment of the risks associated with their mandates, and Environment and Climate Change Canada was one of them.

Mr. Joël Godin: Normally, Environment and Climate Change Canada should be among the five departments because it must lead by example. Was it close to being among the five departments or was it at the back of the pack?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Environment and Climate Change Canada developed the framework explaining how the departments should conduct their risk assessments. The department held meetings with the other departments, but it did not complete its own risk assessment.

Mr. Joël Godin: You do understand that when a department develops a framework for other departments to follow that department should lead by example.

[English]

The Chair: There's no time for that answer. Hopefully your side can pick that up in the next round of questions.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: You're welcome.

Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Commissioner, for being here.

Ms. Leach, thank you very much.

It is great to get this update from the provincial and territorial governments that were participating in this, and I agree this is historic. I was really impressed when you passed along the credit for this report to Ms. Leach. I found that very impressive. Thank you for that.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: It was also due to her team.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Exactly.

I think it's important to look at the past so that we can better chart our future. I thank you for suggesting and acknowledging that our government has at least the best plan you've seen yet. That's interesting.

I'm also impressed that I see Nova Scotia figure prominently in your speaking notes. Of course, we haven't had a chance to read the entire report yet. I'm sure it's not all roses in Nova Scotia; however, it's nice to see that my home province seems to be taking climate change and climate action very seriously.

I'm thinking provincially and territorially. What kind of impact could a change of government have at this stage? There's an election coming up in the next few months in Ontario. What kind of change could there be of our output? As Linda rightly said, our federal government is basically going to be held to account for the success of the provinces and territories. What kind of impact do you think a massive change in our provincial governments could have on our results?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Unfortunately, I really can't comment on that. We did not audit that issue.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Okay, that's fair enough.

You talked about the adaptation strategies as lacking detail. Who has adaptation strategies, and more specifically, who has a good one?

Does anyone have a really good adaptation strategy so that we can look at it and maybe go to school on it?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Nova Scotia actually has a good adaptation strategy. There were a couple of others—Newfoundland as well.

Mr. Darren Fisher: But Nova Scotia's is the best? Okay, good.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Julie Gelfand: The problem was that Nova Scotia's was done in 2005 and hasn't been updated, but yes.

We found that some of the provinces had adaptation strategies and had actually implemented many of the actions in those adaptation strategies. I started my opening remarks by saying that Canadian governments are taking action. Some of them are taking really good action.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Perfect.

You said the federal government was regularly informing the public on the status and results of their actions taken to reduce emissions. How do we do that? Do we do that through social media? Do we just post it on our website? How are we engaging the rest of the country to let them know what our status updates are?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We have to report internationally, and that is how we're reporting. That's how the federal government is reporting, through our international commitments.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Is there a communications program, then, or is there a setup whereby we would be reaching out to Canadians to let them know about our success?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: That I can't answer. You'd have to ask the department.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Okay, good. I'm not sure how much time I have.

The Chair: You have three minutes. You're doing fine.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Three minutes. I'll make a comment first of all. I think we're making huge progress. We've invested in energy-saving technology, we're putting a price on carbon pollution, and we're phasing out coal-fired electricity. Unfortunately, I know Nova Scotia is maybe going to be dragging a bit behind in that, but we're investing nearly \$2 billion to reduce carbon pollution and support a low-carbon economy.

We are making huge progress, but this is a huge challenge, so it's great to see you point out the fact that there's still lots of work to do. I'm glad to hear we're moving in the right direction, though.

If there are any members on the Liberal side, first, who would like two minutes....

Voices: Oh, oh!

If not, I'm happy to pass my time on to Ms. May.

● (1220)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I feel like I'm at an auction. Going, going, gone. Okay.

I have a very quick question, because I know there's a temptation to politicize your audit, and I've heard it said a couple of times at the table that you'd said the current plan is the best plan we've ever had. I wanted to ask if you'd audited the 2005 plan that was put forward when Stéphane Dion was environment minister, and if you've compared his 2005 plan to the current pan-Canadian framework.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I have indicated publicly in the past that it was one of the best plans we've ever seen, and the reason I say this is that it was developed in collaboration with the provinces and territories.

I'm sure Kim has audited all of our plans in the past, but the fact that it was done collaboratively with the provinces and territories is what gives us the confidence to say it's one of the best ones. Normally an auditor would look at a plan and say it's only good if it includes who is going to do what, when, and how much it is going to cost. That is still missing a bit from the pan-Canadian framework. We need some more details, but the fact that it was done collaboratively is what gives us the confidence.

Ms. Elizabeth May: That's fine. Thank you very much. I personally am still very fond of the 2005 plan, because it was audited by Pembina at the time, and they said it would get us very close to Kyoto. I know it was a long time ago, but my problem is my memory, and I really liked that plan.

The Chair: Elizabeth, you have one more minute. I picked up the wrong card, so my apologies.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Oh...no, it's okay. I know we have very little time with the witnesses.

Thank you.

The Chair: We do.

Thank you.

If that's okay, we'll move on to Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Thank you, Commissioner, for appearing again. It's good to have you back.

As you know, one of the tools being used in the pan-Canadian framework on climate change is carbon pricing—carbon taxes and cap and trade. We had the minister at committee very recently—in fact, at our last meeting—and despite our efforts to secure from her an admission that a greenhouse gas emission gap exists, she was not prepared to admit it.

Are you able to say whether Canada presently has a gap between meeting its Paris Agreement targets and the present trajectory of our greenhouse gas reductions?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I would say it's quite clear from the information the government has provided that even if everything in the pan-Canadian framework is implemented, there will still be a gap to achieving the target, yes.

Hon. Ed Fast: Would it somewhere in the order of 66 megatonnes?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Yes. I was going to say 50 to 60 megatonnes—in that zone, yes.

Hon. Ed Fast: All right.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Now the federal government has indicated that it hasn't added in a series of other activities, but right now, from the information we receive, it's quite clear there's still a gap.

Hon. Ed Fast: That's very helpful.

Now with respect to a carbon tax, some provinces have a carbon tax and cap-and-trade system. Some don't have any carbon pricing. We also asked the minister at the last meeting if she could tell us how much of an effect a \$50-per-tonne carbon price, once fully implemented across Canada, would have on greenhouse gas emissions. She was either unable or unwilling to say.

In your work with the provinces in auditing progress under the federal government's climate change plan, have you been able to identify whether any work has been done by any government within Canada on how much a carbon price will lead to emissions?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I'll start to answer that, and maybe Kim will add to it.

What I can say is that a general comment we found across all of these plans was that governments were having a hard time figuring out how many greenhouse gas emissions action A would lead to and how many action B would lead to. They were having difficulty just generally, not with any one tool but almost with all of the tools, identifying clearly what the contributions would be.

Also, we've heard concern about action A actually interfering with action B and maybe having a negative impact on action B, or about what I might term “policy coherence”. Are all the actions actually coherent? It wasn't clear that governments had done enough analysis to achieve that.

Do you want to add anything?

• (1225)

Ms. Kimberley Leach (Principal, Sustainable Development Strategies, Audits and Studies, Office of the Auditor General): Just on the point of whether there is a government you can look to that has done that sort of modelling and has the answer, I would point out that in the text box that we have in exhibit 1 on carbon pricing, we mention that the Government of British Columbia had committed to increasing its carbon tax to \$50 a tonne by 2021. We don't talk about the greenhouse gases that will be reduced by that, but it may be that the B.C. government government has done that modelling.

Hon. Ed Fast: It's very interesting that you would mentioned my home province of British Columbia. We were just talking about Nova Scotia, and now we're talking about British Columbia.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Julie Gelfand: We talk about all the provinces in our report.

Hon. Ed Fast: Yes. I'm glad you're working with all the provinces, because this is a national strategy. If we don't get it right, we could pay a big economic price and a big environmental price, which is why I'm glad you're here.

In British Columbia, of course, the carbon tax was introduced with a very clear understanding that it was going to be revenue-neutral: every dollar raised on the carbon tax would be returned to taxpayers, either corporate taxpayers, business taxpayers, or individual taxpayers.

The recent election of an NDP government in British Columbia changed all that. They eliminated the revenue neutrality and jacked up the tax by another five bucks, which of course means that this has now become a cash cow for the Government of British Columbia. That has been my fear all along: that governments across Canada but more specifically the federal government has not done the analysis to understand how much a \$50-per-tonne carbon price will actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Without having the evidence, that mathematical understanding, we're moving forward with a policy that impacts our economy, that in fact tilts the playing field against Canadian businesses trying to do business in a very competitive global marketplace.

In your work with the provinces, is there anybody who actually has done the work of determining what emission reductions we can expect for the carbon price the federal government expects Canadians to pay?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: I believe we've answered that question by saying that we don't have that information. We know that the provinces and the federal government were having difficulty assigning how much greenhouse gas reduction would occur for each of their individual activities.

I was going to say, though, that between 1:30 and 3 o'clock we are holding a public webinar. The auditors general of British Columbia and Nova Scotia—where did he go?—will both be on that webinar, along with the principal who was responsible for the Northwest Territories. If your staff would like to participate, we could ask the auditor general of British Columbia directly whether or not they have that analysis.

Hon. Ed Fast: It's probably a good idea. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next up is Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): I have just a couple of questions, because many of the questions I was going to ask have been answered already, I won't repeat them.

I was looking at page 10 of the text of your remarks where you say that "greenhouses gases have yet to go down". I was surprised to hear that, because we visited the west just a couple of weeks ago and heard from many groups in Alberta and from the global forum about things that are going on—innovative things to control greenhouse gas emissions, carbon capture, and all that stuff. It's surprising that there hasn't been some reduction.

When I look at the comments about climate change, I think that's pretty obvious across the country, given all of the issues we've had in different parts of the country with floods and fires and all of that stuff.

You were saying, "Meeting the...2030 target will require significant effort and actions on top of what is currently planned or in place." I'm left wondering what specific actions you would

recommend or suggest to the federal government. Is it more financial resources, more human resources, or legislative action? What's required to accomplish that objective?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Again, my role is to be an auditor, which is to audit against what the federal government says it's going to do. It's not my role to provide you with advice on what the federal government should do on this issue.

What I can say as an auditor is that we look to the pan-Canadian framework, and we expect that when we audit that framework we will see implementation plans that are clear, with clear accountabilities and clear allocation of resources to be able to implement that plan.

It is also clear from the information from the federal government that there is still a gap, and I understand that the government has a series of other activities that were not included in the pan-Canadian framework that they indicate will contribute to reductions—things like transit and all the other investments—but we haven't audited these. When I come back in 2020 or in 2021 and we've audited the beginnings of the pan-Canadian framework, we'll be able to give you more information.

• (1230)

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you very much for that. I'm just happy to see that you mentioned my home province, as well, on a couple of occasions, and we're happy to see that some things are happening, of course, that will get us to the targets we want to get to by 2020 or 2030. I realize that the targets are not being met from your perspective at this point, so that's why I was asking the question what specifically we need to do as parliamentarians and legislators and governments, federal and provincial, to get us to that level.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: One of the things you can do is something this committee can do, and I know it does already. We have a section called "Moving Forward". It's a series of questions that all legislators can ask of their government. It's on page 25 of 26. These are questions that you can ask your government officials, and you can keep asking them. You can ask for their action plans and keep asking them these questions. That is why we put these questions in there, to provide you with some tools to hold your governments to account.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Perfect. Now we're getting somewhere.

Thank you very much for that, Madam Speaker. I've concluded my remarks.

The Chair: I know you said you wanted to go at 12:30. We have one more to make it a full round.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Sure, of course.

The Chair: If we could have Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Thank you very much.

I am a federal member of Parliament, therefore my questions to you will be to do with my mandate to hold the federal government accountable.

When I look at your report—as usual a fabulous, detailed, and helpful report—you note a lot of concerns with the failure by the federal government. Few federal departments or agencies have assessed or acted on climate change risks. Environment Canada did not develop an adaptation action plan. Environment Canada did not provide adequate leadership and guidance to other federal organizations to adapt adaptation plans. The government did not consistently report publicly on the results of implementing its regs—I would add there that the federal government has yet to implement its regs either on the carbon tax, methane, or the stepped-up agenda for shutting down coal-fired. The government did not clearly indicate how it would measure, monitor, and report on provincial and territorial contributions to Canada's 2030 target.

You reported many similar issues last fall. You reported these in your previous report on adaptation and so forth. Do you have confidence in their response to you that more will be coming?

I add to that the concern in the decision of the federal government to delay the release of federal funds to the provinces and territories—and to first nations and Métis settlements—to take their action. I just look at the delay in the release of money. Do you have confidence that the federal government is understanding your report and the fact that you're calling for expedited action?

Ms. Julie Gelfand: As you know, Ms. Duncan, my role is to audit the government on its actions. You have clearly outlined some of the concerns we've raised. We've made recommendations to the government on all these issues. They have accepted our recommendations.

The role I can play is to follow up and audit. The role this committee can play is to bring the government to this table and ask them those questions.

We have been auditing climate change for a decade at least, if not more, and we will continue to audit this subject.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Yes, it's not very reassuring. Clearly, as you stated, Commissioner, it is the federal government that's going to have the responsibility to hold Canada accountable for delivering.... Most of these reports are based on the Copenhagen targets, but I notice in the declaration that everybody's committed to the Paris targets as well. Can I presume that your next audit will include looking to that as well?

• (1235)

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Yes.

In our last audit we looked at both the 2020 and 2030 targets, and will continue to audit against the 2030 target. We found when we looked across the country that there were only three to four jurisdictions that actually had 2030 targets.

As well, what I didn't say in my opening statement is that some of these targets are based on different baseline years, and there's one other big issue on targets: some of them are sector-based. Some governments have an economy-wide target, and others have targets that are based on sectors. The concern as an auditor is we're all aiming at the same target, but we're not sure that everybody is aiming at that target.

The value of this is to see that in black and white and to encourage auditors general to do this again after my mandate is over: do another collaborative audit in 2023 and 2024, and then maybe another one in 2027 as we aim towards 2030. I think that would be a wonderful piece of work.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank you, Commissioner Gelfand, and Ms. Leach, for taking the time to come to present this to us.

It's really nice to see that the government saw the importance of a partnership with the provinces and territories in trying to meet the target and going about that work. That you've reflected on that and done it at the audit level is fantastic; it's really appreciated. You've given us a lot of good work to reflect on what needs to be done.

It is a challenge, because it isn't all within our mandate. It's about working with others who have different mandates to meet this very important goal for Canada.

Thank you for all you've done. Thank you for taking the initiative, going outside of the box, and doing it differently. We really appreciate it. Thank you for your suggestions on what we can do to hold the government's feet to the fire, and thank you for accommodating all of the back-and-forth this morning with the votes.

Ms. Julie Gelfand: Thank you very much, and you're most welcome.

The Chair: I will suspend, and then we'll be back in a few minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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