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Chair

Mr. James Bezan

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

We are going to start doing our study of the Federal Sustainable Development Act and a review of the draft federal sustainable development strategy, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and subsection 9(3) of the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

We have joining us today as witnesses, from the Department of the Environment, Michael Keenan, the assistant deputy minister for the strategic policy branch, and from the Department of Public Works and Government Services, Caroline Weber, assistant deputy minister of corporate services, policy and communications branch.

Welcome, both of you, to the table. We're looking forward to your opening comments.

Mr. Keenan, please kick us off.

Mr. Michael Keenan (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of the Environment): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

I would like to begin by describing the proposed approach we are taking to the implementation of the Federal Sustainable Development Act. I will then respond to your questions and comments.

The draft strategy released last week represents focused work to improve the way the federal government plans for sustainable development and, importantly, to address weaknesses of the old system that have been noted by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development and others.

Since 1995, when the Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development was created, the federal government had planned for sustainable development through the preparation and tabling of individual departmental sustainable development strategies. These strategies were produced every three years between 1997 and 2006. This was a very decentralized approach. Almost from the time of implementation, it was criticized repeatedly as lacking central leadership, coordination and follow-up.

[English]

As a result, in 2006 the Minister of the Environment, Minister Ambrose at the time, released a fourth and final round of departmental strategies committed to strengthening the overall approach to sustainable development. As members of the committee

know well—as many contributed, through hard work—the Federal Sustainable Development Act was passed in June 2008 with all-party support. The purpose of the act is to provide a legal framework for developing and implementing the federal sustainable development strategy to make environmental decision-making more transparent and accountable.

We would submit that the draft strategy represents the first significant improvement to sustainable development planning and reporting since 1995, and reflects the government's commitment to environmental sustainability through improved transparency and accountability. The draft strategy is geared to making environmental decision-making more transparent and accountable. Our hope and plan is that this greater transparency would in turn drive progress in environmental decision-making. The update of the strategy and the reporting on results every three years provides the basis for constant improvement and innovation over the long term.

The greater transparency that drives the cycle of continuous progress would be the result of three key improvements coming from the new federal sustainable development strategy. The first is it provides an integrated, whole-of-government view of federal actions and results to achieve goals in environmental sustainability. So instead of a production of 32 stand-alone and sometimes inconsistent departmental reports—as was done under the previous approach—the government will now produce one sustainable development strategy that reflects actions across government.

The second is it links sustainable development planning and reporting to key planning and decision-making processes of the government, particularly the expenditure management system.

Third, it would drive real progress on environmental sustainability by establishing effective monitoring and reporting on results, which in turn allows parliamentarians and Canadians to track progress across the Government of Canada towards meeting goals and targets with respect to environmental sustainability.

I'd like to just take a minute in terms of each of these three features because they are at the heart of the new strategy. In terms of the whole-of-government approach, it is something that has been cropping up in comments from the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development as far back as 2001, when he commented on the lack of a common management approach to sustainable development across the Government of Canada. The draft strategy reflects not just a common management approach but the product of significant senior-level engagement across the government to ensure a whole-of-government approach underneath in terms of the work that contributes to this strategy. A lot of that is driven through the sustainable development office that we have created in Environment Canada.

The proposed approach is to allow parliamentarians to have a one-stop view across the entire government of goals, of targets, and of implementation activities that are driving towards those.

The second element of key importance is the linking to the government-wide planning and reporting. At the broadest level, this mainstreams, if you will, the management of sustainable development as recommended by the OECD and other organizations. It brings sustainable development into the core budgeting planning processes and systems of the Government of Canada. It provides much better access to various information in terms of activities and results generating from those activities, and it reflects comments from the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development where he has recommended that the sustainable development strategies adopt and follow the forms of the reports on plans and priorities as mandated by the Treasury Board Secretariat.

In terms of monitoring and reporting, we are proposing in this strategy a new approach that places a much greater emphasis on the use of objective and rigorous data that's much more focused on results with respect to the environment as opposed to processes and activities. In supporting that, we're making much better use of data under the Canadian environmental sustainability indicators program. This was a program for which the Government of Canada renewed funding in the latest federal budget.

Again, I think this would map to many comments we've seen from the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development where he's looking for a standardized process for monitoring the implementation and reporting on progress. That would in turn be a powerful factor for a future federal sustainable development strategy.

• (1535)

The goal in this plan and in these three features is to establish a system that will, over time, drive a continuous cycle of improvement based on the principles of "plan, do, check, and improve" that are often favoured by auditors and agencies such as the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

With these three key management features in the foundation, the strategy outlines and encompasses goals, targets, and implementation strategies in four areas that are of high importance with respect to environmental sustainability: addressing climate change and air quality; maintaining water availability and quality; protecting nature; and finally, shrinking the environmental footprint, beginning with government.

The tables in the consultation paper reflect a snapshot of the situation today with respect to the goals, targets, and implementation strategies across the Government of Canada. The proposed federal strategy is meant to provide a basis to report on these goals in a highly transparent manner. It does not, in and of itself, establish new goals or new implementation strategies, but it creates the transparency by which the core decision-making processes of governments can move forward in these areas of environmental sustainability.

As a result, there is a visage, a strategy, through which the situation with respect to goals, targets, and implementation strategies is dynamic and evolves over time; ideally, and on purpose, the transparency from this strategy would help to drive that process of advancing these issues with respect to environmental sustainability.

Online consultations on the proposed federal sustainable development strategy began last week. Canadians, parliamentarians, the sustainable development advisory committee, and others are now in the process of reviewing the strategy and providing their comments during the 120-day review period, which ends in early July. The government will then pull together a final strategy based on the advice that we receive and envisages tabling a final strategy in Parliament very soon after its resumption in the fall, within the 15 sitting days of June 26, as required in legislation.

This is a long-term endeavour. All of the advice and the best practices mention the focus on the long term, but there is a sense in this strategy that it puts in place the foundation for a cycle of continuous innovation and continuous improvement in every three-year cycle. That is at the heart of the new strategy.

I would like to close, Mr. Chair, by emphasizing the government's commitment to improving sustainable development, and as the head of the federal sustainable development office, I want to emphasize our commitment in terms of driving this change and this innovation, based on the guidance of this committee and others, in the implementation of a new federal sustainable development strategy.

Thank you for your time.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Keenan. I appreciate your opening comments.

I want to remind the committee that we have votes tonight at 5:30. The bells will go off at 5:15, so we have about an hour and a half. I'm going to be judicious and make sure everybody stays within the timeframe so that everyone has a chance to ask questions.

Kicking off the seven-minute round is Mr. McGuinty.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Keenan and Ms. Weber, for being here.

Mr. Keenan, I want to go back to a couple of things and correct the record about the indicators initiative you mentioned. I don't think you addressed this, but it's important for folks to know.

When Minister Martin was Minister of Finance, he asked the Prime Minister's national round table to devise a small suite of indicators so he could use them in budget-making speeches to tell Canadians the fuller truth about the state of our well-being. I don't think it's quite correct for you to suggest in your remarks that the government has renewed funding for all those indicators. We know, for example, that the indicator dealing with either wetlands or forest cover, which was being pursued in cooperation with our space agency, had its funding reduced significantly.

I also want to ask you a really interesting question—maybe not interesting to you, but interesting to me.

Mr. Mulroney signed the original agreements in 1992 in Rio and created the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. It was supposed to be our principal institutional response to the Rio declaration and the agreements we signed there. Mr. Mulroney had the wisdom to create a body that was based in his office. It was the Prime Minister's round table based out of PCO.

Since the arrival of the Conservatives, they have demoted this organization and it now reports directly only to the Minister of the Environment. They changed its enabling legislation without debate. I think that's a terrible mistake, just as I'm deeply worried about what you're presenting here—that this national sustainable development strategy is going to be enforced and developed by Environment Canada. My recollection is that Environment Canada is the second- or third-least funded department in the federal government.

By situating this strategy inside Environment Canada you're making it the “enviro-cop” of the federal government. Sustainable development is not supposed to be about the marginalization of these issues into an environment department. We saw the government do that already with the Prime Minister's round table, and then it cut eight of its 26 positions just last week.

Environment Canada has very limited capacity in policy, very little economic modelling capacity, very little econometric history, and very little reach and influence on Finance Canada and the Treasury Board. How do you see this new office, based in Environment Canada, with seemingly revolving ministers of the environment over three and five years, as being capable of influencing the entire federal government, with its \$257 billion worth of spending? Why shouldn't this organization be based where it properly should have been with the round table at PCO, where its responsibility is to steer and not so much to row?

● (1545)

The Chair: I will just pause your time there, Mr. McGuinty, and draw your attention to page 1,068 in chapter 20 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, regarding the questioning of public servants:

The obligation of a witness to answer all questions put by the committee must be balanced against the role that public servants play in providing confidential advice to their ministers. The role of the public servant has traditionally been viewed in relation to the implementation and administration of government policy, rather than the determination of what that policy should be. Consequently, public servants have been excused from commenting on the policy decisions made by the government

Mr. Keenan, I'll let you answer Mr. McGuinty's questions within the purview in which you feel comfortable.

There are four minutes remaining.

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think there were four questions, and I have four minutes.

I'll go quite quickly through the issue you raise in terms of environmental indicators.

I think, Mr. Chair, the honourable member is absolutely right that the Canadian environmental sustainability indicators program, which runs at about \$9.2 million a year, was renewed for two years by this government in the budget. That program will enable the collection of water quality information, air quality information, and protected lands information across the country. It's a very important program, and in my view, and in the view of the federal sustainable development office, that renewal has been intrinsically positive to our ability to create results-based indicators to track the strategy.

I think the member's right in the sense that there are other environmental indicators, beyond the ones funded in this program, and that you have to have a picture of the whole thing. But the continuation of that \$9 million program is really key to providing us with the tools we need for this.

In terms of the funding for Environment Canada, I don't know where it ranks. I know that our mains this year have asked Parliament for \$1.1 billion. That would make it far above the second or third smallest. I think we're somewhere in the middle of the pack, but I couldn't say exactly where.

In terms of EC being the enviro-cop of econometric capacity, let me say that as the assistant deputy minister of strategic policy, I am responsible for economic analysis in Environment Canada. I can tell you that our ability to do econometric modelling and enviro-econometric modelling can't be touched.

The Department of Finance sometimes gets nervous, because we can model impacts that they can't touch and don't understand. I've been in charge of econometric modelling at the Department of Agriculture and at Environment Canada, and actually, we have a pretty good capacity.

Mr. David McGuinty: Let me just ask you, Mr. Keenan, how many staff you have doing economic modelling.

Mr. Michael Keenan: The environmental analysis directorate is running at about 40-some people. They do a wide range of economic analysis. The core group that does econometric modelling probably runs to around a dozen. We commit significant resources, and I would submit that our ability to model the interaction of the environment and the economy in an econometrically valid manner is untouched in the Canadian context. I'm getting off track a little bit.

In terms of being the enviro-cop, I think it's an important point. The point of leadership across the government is a key issue and is critical to the success of this strategy. Our approach, and my approach, has been to convene, on a regular cycle, senior officials at the assistant deputy minister level across the system.

We've built an extremely strong partnership with the Treasury Board Secretariat, because that's intrinsic to the second feature of the program, which is to link sustainable development with the expenditure management system. Because of the strong partnership with the Treasury Board Secretariat and the general support we have around the system, I'm confident that we can run the federal sustainable development office out of Environment Canada and achieve significant change in the management of sustainable development.

• (1550)

The Chair: There are only about 10 seconds left, so we'll just move on.

Mr. David McGuinty: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Bigras, *vous avez sept minutes*.

[Translation]

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

First of all, I want to thank you for presenting to us your sustainable development strategy. We had been waiting for it for several weeks.

This is a strategy that you will have to present to Parliament and to an advisory council on sustainable development comprised of one representative from each province and three representatives from other sectors, such as first nations, non-governmental organizations, the business community and organized labour.

Have all of the representatives been appointed and is the full make-up of the council now known?

Mr. Michael Keenan: The short answer to these questions is yes, and yes.

[English]

As the member has accurately described, the legislation requires the appointment of 25 members to the sustainable development advisory committee. All 25 have been appointed by the minister.

My office has connected with each of the 25, and I've just started the process of scheduling the first introductory meeting—it's going to be a teleconference—of the advisory committee. I believe we're doing that on March 30.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Let me be clear about what you are saying. All of the provinces have at least one representative on the council.

Mr. Michael Keenan: Yes, all of the provinces appoint at least one representative to the council.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Could we possibly see the list of council members?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I'd be happy to provide you with the list of names. As a matter of fact, we are just now handing the clerk copies of the membership list.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Fine.

I have looked at your draft Federal Sustainable Development Strategy. As I see it, one of the key elements of a sustainable development strategy, albeit not the be-all and end-all, is the so-called strategic environmental assessment.

Where is this key element of a sustainable development strategy to be found in your document?

It is important to remember that since 1994, I believe, each department has been required, pursuant to a directive from the Prime Minister's Office, to conduct a strategic environmental assessment of plans, policies and programs.

Where in your sustainable development strategy is provision made to require departments, in accordance with this directive or order, to conduct a strategic environmental assessment?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I will answer the question in English.

[English]

Mr. Chair, the honourable member is right, there is a cabinet directive on strategic environmental assessment that has been in place for a number of years. The proposed changes are a very important element of the decision-making in the Government of Canada. The proposed changes that are a part of the federal sustainable development strategy do not change that directive. That directive remains in place and is part of the foundation of environmental decision-making going forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I understand that this does not change the directive, but we have seen from experience and from the various reports by commissioners of the environment that a number of departments do not comply with the directive from the Prime Minister's Office.

I recall the heading of one chapter in the Commissioner of the Environment's report which claimed that Finance Canada was dragging its feet. That was the assessment of the Commissioner of the Environment of the department's compliance with the strategic environment assessment requirement.

Could you tell me how the Sustainable Development Office will be able to issue a clearer directive than the one issued by the Prime Minister's Office? Fundamentally, parliamentarians agreed to adopt Mr. Godfrey's bill several years ago because they believed that legislation with more bite was needed.

So then, how can you convince us that this legislation, adopted by Parliament, will ensure that one of the key elements of the sustainable development strategy, namely the strategic environmental assessment, will be embraced by all departments? That's what I want to know.

• (1555)

[English]

Mr. Michael Keenan: Mr. Chair, I'll respond to that question in two ways.

One is to say that while the strategy does not change the application of the cabinet directive on strategic environmental assessments and does not change the roles—for example, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency has a key role in the administration of it, and the Privy Council Office has a key role in the administration of it in ensuring the orderly preparation of memoranda to cabinet—the federal sustainability strategy will in a significant manner support the application of that directive in the following way, by means of the second feature, which links to sustainable development.

In the current system, the sustainable development strategies were kept, if you will, to the side. They were not linked to the expenditure management system; they were not linked to the major processes of decision-making through MCs and through Treasury Board submissions. By linking sustainable development to the expenditure management system, we bring the information on sustainable development into the expenditure management system. That is precisely the information that is included in a memorandum to cabinet, which is where the scans and the assessments with respect to the directive apply. We'll bring better information into that decision-making process, and I believe that will enable the government to do a better job of operating the cabinet directive on strategic environmental assessment.

One of the issues is the quality of the information concerning environmental impacts, which is one of the key considerations in the scan and in deciding how to apply the directive. This strategy, once fully in place, once linking sustainable development and environmental goals and targets and implementation strategies into the expenditure management system, will thereby bring that information into decision-making documents, such as memoranda to cabinet, and in that indirect but powerful way will, I believe, support better application of the strategic environmental assessment.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I see.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Bigras.

Ms. Duncan, you have the floor.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Keenan and Ms. Weber, thanks for coming before us today.

One thing that puzzles me, Mr. Keenan, is that this act is very clear. It starts out in section 3 by saying that the “purpose of this Act is to provide the legal framework” for holding the government

accountable on sustainable development. So “legal framework” is very clear.

Then subsection 11(4) provides for the making of regulations, clearly outlining exactly how those reports are to be provided.

I did a search. I can't find any regulations that have been promulgated. We found a legally non-binding guide document.

So where is the legal framework for implementing this statute that has supposedly specifically provided a legal framework to therefore ensure accountability?

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you for the question. I'll respond in two parts.

I don't mean to quibble, but in terms of the purpose of the act—and this has been important for us, because we've been very much guided by section 3 of the act—is to make environmental decision-making more transparent and accountable, as opposed to sustainable development. It's important because we've really focused on environmental decision-making in terms of the descriptions of the goals and targets.

That's not a central answer to your question, but I think it's important, because we have been very much guided by the legislation.

• (1600)

Ms. Linda Duncan: I don't have any problem with that. My question remains.

Mr. Michael Keenan: It does.

Ms. Linda Duncan: It says that it's to “provide a legal framework”. So is the department in the process of promulgating the regulations?

Mr. Michael Keenan: Our view in developing this is that the act itself gives us a very clear legal framework, and we have been proceeding to working across the government to establish a system of planning on goals, targets, and implementation strategies, and of tracking our results-based progress.

Our approach in the sustainable development office has been to drive a pretty systemic change across the system, using principles of instrument choice to make regulations only where we think we need them in order to get this done. So far, our assessment is that we do not need to define regulations to get this done.

We're working with Treasury Board in establishing the guidelines departments have to follow in terms of how they report in the expenditure management system. This is enough of a...I'm not sure whether hammer is the right word, but it's creating the environment for getting the change we need.

If we get to a point—

Ms. Linda Duncan: Can I just...? This is simple. I don't need you to elaborate on that any more. I actually want to follow up on a point you just made, which Mr. Bigras had raised.

Given that you state, "It links sustainable development planning and reporting to key planning and decision-making...particularly, the Expenditure Management System", I can't find anywhere in your sustainable development future consultation paper where you have specifically targeted something for the Treasury Board or the Department of Finance to do.

Now, you can correct me, if I'm wrong.

Mr. Michael Keenan: That's an interesting point. I would say it may not be jumping off the page, but where we talk about linking sustainable development to core planning, on pages 5 and 6, underneath that there is.... We have asked, and Treasury Board has responded positively, in terms of working through a very specific mandated linkage between the goals and targets and implementation strategies, which are in the tables, and the RPPs and the DPRs that departments have to complete every year as part of the expenditure management system.

So I guess we didn't mention it—that's a fair point—but it is happening on the ground.

Ms. Linda Duncan: It does say that it will target specific departments to do things.

I noticed on page 23 of your consultation paper, concerning aboriginal safe drinking water, you again reiterate that the government will deliver legislation sometime. That was actually promised in the throne speech of 2009.

I'm surprised that you don't have a target date so that it can be measurable and accountable. I just wanted to point out that it doesn't really seem to give a clear target date, although that promise was made a couple of years over.

I wanted to follow up on the question my colleague Monsieur Bigras raised about the infrastructure program, which specifically exempted infrastructure projects under Building Canada from environmental assessment and the Navigable Waters Protection Act.

How do you rationalize that under the federal sustainable development strategy?

Mr. Michael Keenan: Let me respond to the aboriginal question. I'd like to go back to check. It may be possible that we've missed a date. If that's the case, we'll ensure that it's—

Ms. Linda Duncan: Consider that my input to your draft. It would be helpful to have an actual date.

Mr. Michael Keenan: There's an important distinction that we've been trying to make in our minds and in our communications of this. We're proposing a management system that we believe will be a significant improvement over the former management system for sustainable development. We're not proposing to supplant or replace all of the decision-making the government does; we're proposing to bring more transparency to it.

I'll use an example. You mentioned the change in the environmental assessment procedures for infrastructure projects. We're not trying to replace that decision, any decision taken on any budget, or any other decision. What we're trying to do in the strategy is provide great transparency as to what they do in terms of activities and what they do in terms of results with respect to the environment.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Let me give you another example, just to make clear where I would expect real targets can be set up so that you can measure whether the government has actually delivered. Another one is under Public Works, on page 9, concerning greening government operations, where the suggestion is that there will be action taken towards green government.

The Obama government, in its last budget—not this one—targeted that 75% of federal government buildings will be energy retrofitted in two years. I don't see any kind of real targets here or target dates whereby you could measure whether the government is actually delivering. It remains incredibly vague to me. I would have thought that, given that you have these guideline documents on how you might do it, it's much more helpful to measure whether the government is actually moving in a certain direction.

Concerning aboriginal safe drinking water, the government gave an end date: they said they would table that legislation last year. That's an example of how you hold the government accountable. Then they can say, here are the reasons that we couldn't deliver on that target date. But when you have no target date whatsoever, it becomes pretty amorphous, and it doesn't look as though it's a real commitment to a deliverable.

Thank you.

● (1605)

The Chair: Your time has expired.

If you wish to respond, I'd ask that you make a very brief response.

Mr. Michael Keenan: Very briefly, your point about targets is a good one. Page 18 or somewhere near in the document describes the standard for targets in the future, which is that they're time-bound, they're specific, and they're measurable. That is an ideal to which we would like to move the entire system.

I'll turn to my colleague to respond briefly concerning greening government operations.

Ms. Caroline Weber (Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services, Policy and Communications Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you very much for the question.

We are working across the Government of Canada to talk about both targets and measurement because we haven't done anything like this before in concert, in a unified way, that applied to so many departments at once in the same way, and we don't have the underlying systems to then report on a common indicator. We are in progress and we're hoping to have something ready for the final strategy. We are having those conversations.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Warawa, you can finish off the seven-minute round.

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

Thank you, Mr. Keenan and Ms. Weber, for being here.

I find this a very interesting discussion, actually. I had the pleasure of working with my colleague—a Liberal colleague, but a colleague—who had a passion for the environment. That was Mr. John Godfrey. There was the initial proposal that he had—his private member's bill, the Federal Sustainable Development Act—and then over the months, a couple of years ago, we came up with a position where it was amended, the committee dealt with it, and we had unanimous support around this table.

How quickly those two years have gone by. Now we are faced with continuing on that good work. We have each received this consultation paper, which I found very helpful, and I am sure we are all happy to be able to provide some input.

Page 1 makes it very clear that the goals in here are aspirational, but they also provide a long-term focus. On page 1 of this consultation paper, reference is made to the OECD study. It says: ^{An}

OECD study has found that, where governments have attempted to move too quickly and on too many simultaneous fronts to achieve sustainable development, governance systems have become overloaded and paralyzed, and little progress has been made.

You referred to that study on pages 4 and 5 of your speech.

I don't think the problem with the Liberals was that they tried to do too much in too little time. I think it was quite the opposite. The commissioner at the time said there was a lack of leadership, but those days have changed. It was the decade of darkness, as it was referred to. Anyway, we have moved on, and here we are working together on sustainable development.

Sustainable development in this reference paper is also referred to as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. That is good.

You also refer to Minister Ambrose. I've had the pleasure of working with Minister Ambrose, Minister Baird, and now Minister Prentice, all of them very capable and committed people. I think Mr. McGuinty referred to the number of ministers. My understanding is that during those years when not much happened, there were five Liberal ministers; we have had three in the time I've been able to represent the government as a parliamentary secretary. They have been years of getting a lot of things done, and again we have before us this discussion paper.

My question refers to a statement Minister Ambrose made just after we became government in 2006. She said that she would be looking at a range of options, including legislation around national sustainable development and reviewing global best practices as Canada makes further progress toward putting sustainability at the heart of the government's activities.

Can you tell us how the government has kept that promise?

• (1610)

Mr. Michael Keenan: I'd be happy to. Thank you for the question.

In terms of going back to the quote from the Minister of the Environment that you just went through, the proposed system, we

believe, delivers on that commitment and that vision going back a couple of years in each of the three key changes.

For example, the change had mentioned about linking the sustainable development into the expenditure management system. If you go to the OECD, if you go to the best practices on sustainable development, the International Institute for Sustainable Development's 19-country survey, they keep coming back to this key touchstone that if sustainable development is going to change decision-making, it has to be mainstreamed into the decision-making system. Bringing sustainable development into the expenditure management system does exactly that, and that is one where I think there's a strong resonance between the best practice globally and a key change here that reflects where the minister was trying to go at the time.

On the second—I was not working in the Department of the Environment at the time—I've heard that part of the problem was that the minister at the time was sitting with 32 reports. If you looked at one against the other, they didn't make any sense. They weren't consistent. They didn't add up to any coherent picture. I think that reflects, again, one of the key best practices you see in sustainable development, that across a government, across a society, you need something that puts together different activities of different departments into a coherent picture.

This moving to a whole-of-government approach, where we establish all-of-government targets and then organize the activities across different departments, it doesn't matter where they are, by the targets and by the result that the government is trying to achieve and has held itself accountable to would be a second key evolution and a second key improvement that reflects the minister's desire to make changes that align to best practice.

The third—again, a common theme—is you need a system that gives you that “plan, do, check, improve” audit cycle, something that can track progress, and that progress, or lack thereof, can be part of the feedback loop for taking action and adjusting. The three-year cycles for planning and reporting on progress that are part of this strategy, and quite frankly are in the legislation, are key to driving that almost three-year cycle of ongoing improvement.

The commitment to move towards results-based indicators of progress as opposed to activity-based is a fundamental one. If you read through the reports that have been part of the former system, sometimes they're indicators of progress. Where a public servant went to a conference and presented a paper, that's a good activity, but that's not progress in terms of environmental sustainability...and shifting away from those kinds of indicators to ones about the environment improving in a local or a national context.

I think those three key features, which align to best practices you see in the OECD and other organizations that have looked rigorously at sustainable development, are delivering a change that I believe—I can't speak for the minister—delivers on the promise of what she was trying to commit the government to in 2006.

The Chair: Thank you.

Your time has expired.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you.

The Chair: I know it goes fast when you're having fun.

So we'll go to the five-minute round.

Mr. Scarpaleggia, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Obviously, we support this initiative because it was this very committee that examined Mr. Godfrey's bill and recommended that it be adopted.

This afternoon, we are having a discussion of a very high conceptual nature. We are talking about initiatives that are good in and of themselves, about goals and about aligning the activities of each department. However, can you explain further to me how in concrete terms the system will work?

Each department will submit sustainable development plans to your office. However, what happens if a department's goals are not aligned with, or maybe even run counter to, those of other departments?

Would you contact your minister and would he speak to the Minister of Natural Resources to advise him that his sustainable development plan does not work because it clashes with your department's plan, or that of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans?

Explain to me how this will actually work on a day-to-day basis.

•(1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The honourable member has described, I believe in a very clear way, one of the key challenges of the former system, which was that each department wrote its own plan, so each plan had its own set of objectives and its own framework. They didn't actually necessarily go together, and you couldn't get a picture.

On a very practical level, one of the key changes is that the starting point in this new system, as required by the legislation that this committee was instrumental in producing, is not a departmental plan but an entire federal government plan. Our office works with all the departments to understand what they're doing, what they're trying to do, and put that into a coherent picture of overarching goals of government-wide targets and of implementation activities to deliver on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: With all due respect, I have to interrupt you. My time is limited.

The fact is that you receive recommendations, but the departments' proposals, goals and targets have to come from somewhere. You're not the one coming up with projects for every department. You receive a document from a department, along with recommendations, and if these are not aligned with the goals of other departments, you speak to your deputy minister who in turn speaks to an assistant or to the minister and tells them to contact a particular minister because his objectives do not jibe with the federal government's vision of sustainable development. It is possible that things could come to a bureaucratic impasse.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Keenan: You're absolutely right. This strategy does not replace government decision-making. The targets and the implementation strategies are not established only by departments, they actually have to be established through decision-making processes. So a memorandum to cabinet goes to cabinet and is approved, and the programming then has to be submitted to Treasury Board for approval. By bringing all of this integrated picture of sustainable development together, it brings that information to the decision-making, first of all.

Secondly, there are gaps. Even if you look at this table, there are some areas where the government currently doesn't have a target but is working towards one. I believe the strategy makes that more transparent. As my colleague was mentioning, their good work on greening government operations, I would submit, has been accelerated and is given more force by the fact that we're publishing documents to all Canadians showing that we do not yet have targets but are working towards them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I quite understand. Every year, or every three years, you will draft a report indicating whether or not the government has met its own objectives. Will you report to the House of Commons, or to the Senate? We will see about the Senate a little later. One bill focuses on the Senate. So then, you will submit a report every year to the House of Commons and point out that while the government has set a specific goal, it has only been 60%, 40% or 80% successful in meeting that goal. Am I correct?

•(1620)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'd ask for a quick response.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: You seem to have a set a goal, namely to develop harmonized climate change strategies with the United States. What exactly does this mean?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Keenan: In terms of the honourable member's description of the process, just before the last question, I would say, yes, that is the approach.

In terms of your last question, I believe the minister actually spoke to that in a fairly specific sense when he appeared at this committee last week on the main estimates. He described key next steps that he envisaged in terms of moving forward with regulations to address greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation sector, harmonized with the United States.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Woodworth, it's your turn.

[Translation]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you very much to the witnesses, Mr. Keenan and Ms. Weber, for coming to us today. I have appreciated your crisp and clear presentation.

Quite frankly, I'm very excited about this strategy simply because it does represent such a step forward and I think it's going to turbocharge the government's efforts on the environment.

I'll take one of the things you said, Mr. Keenan, as a starting point on that, that the draft strategy "represents the first significant improvement to sustainable development planning and reporting since 1995".

As I understand it, in fact, the existing or previous system was established by the former Liberal government in 1995. Almost immediately it became subject to criticism and it was clear that it was not achieving the intended results.

What did that government do? Well, that government did nothing. That government did nothing for 11 long years.

In fact, in 2001—

The Chair: Mr. Bigras has a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: As we know, Mr. Chair, committees engage in non-partisan work, to the extent possible. We started off fine, but I would ask you to tell the member to get back to the subject at hand.

[English]

The Chair: I think that's a matter of debate, because politics does enter into committee all too often in my opinion, but we are politicians at the end of the day.

Mr. Woodworth, perhaps you could be a little more gracious with your comments.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I'll be more gracious. I'll be less enthusiastic. I was in some respects responding to Mr. McGuinty's earlier comments about folks needing to put this in perspective. So I did want to comment that in 2001 or 2002 the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development made some observations, and again nothing happened with those, but then our government was elected, and in just 18 short months, we produced an all-party agreement on a new approach. We're grateful to Mr. Godfrey, we're grateful to Mr. Warawa, for coming up with that. And now, hardly more than 18 months later, we have this strategy in front of it.

Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to say that I'm very proud to be part of a government that does the heavy lifting on the environment and a government that does deliver results.

In particular, I noticed that among your comments, Mr. Keenan, was a statement that the management of sustainable development is now going to be linked into the core system that the government uses for planning, priority-setting, budgeting, decision-making, and managing results. This certainly seems to be a significant change over the old system, and I wondered if you could describe some of the ways that new system is an improvement over the previous one established by the former government and also how as a result it addresses some of those criticisms by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you for the question.

The new system or the proposed system that's described in the consultation paper before you does represent a significant change. It is absolutely true that the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development has commented repeatedly on the weaknesses of the system. I think in the minister's message, there's one of the better quotes. He said it was like putting together a jigsaw puzzle without having the box to show you what the jigsaw puzzle is supposed to look like .

I think the shift to the whole-of-government approach where you bring together all of the pieces so you can see what the box is supposed to look like is a key innovation and a positive change in terms of the management of sustainable development.

The second one, which I think is mentioned several times, is the fact that the sustainable development is now linked to the expenditure management system. I'll give you an example of why that's particularly important. The Government of Canada has a very significant clean air agenda. There are currently 44 programs delivered across nine departments, which add up to, I think, about \$2.2 billion a year, all with the goal of advancing clean air. If you look through the sustainable development strategies, it's hard to get any sense of those programs. Those are very important programs that speak to a very important environmental goal. Under the former system, you couldn't get any decent picture of what they were. Now as it happens, as part of the expenditure management system, the Government of Canada put a summary of those programs and what they're accomplishing in Canada's performance report, a key Treasury Board document that describes the results achieved for the more than \$200 billion of taxpayers' money that's spent by the federal government.

That kind of information describing what the government is doing on clean air and what effect it's having in terms of air quality would be at the core of a new sustainable development strategy. I'd submit that it would be one that would have information to enable parliamentarians and Canadians to get a clear picture of something like clean air and what's going on, which would represent in a practical, concrete sense a significant improvement.

•(1625)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now in the five-minute round.

Monsieur Ouellet, s'il vous plaît .

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have to say that I have a problem with the wording. Could you clarify a few things for me?

To my way of thinking, sustainable development has to include the environment. In order to preserve the environment, development must often be restrained. There is also the social aspect to be taken into consideration. On page 19, you refer to implementation strategies. Mention is made of chemicals, but does that also include asbestos, uranium and tar sands? As for point 2.2.1, I don't quite understand what choices you are going to make. On what will you base your choices? Will you take into account the three key elements of sustainable development?

[English]

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you for the question.

I would start with the more specific question, which is with respect to implementation strategy 2.2.1 in the background tables. That implementation strategy and those activities relate to the chemical management plan that the Government of Canada is pursuing, which is to go through in large batches and assess a wide range of chemicals that are in use today to get a sense of their potential risks to the environment and human health, and then to develop management plans accordingly.

I probably can't tell you a lot more about those details because I don't work directly in that program, but I would be happy to provide more information to you, if that's helpful.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Could a parliamentarian or simply a departmental official ask you to include uranium or tar sands?

[English]

Mr. Michael Keenan: I would submit two things.

There is a process by which the department, in collaboration with other departments like Health Canada, is working through large batches of assessments. My understanding is that their prioritization is a scientifically based prioritization. I would imagine that they would take input from whatever sources in that prioritization. I can't speak to that in any great detail, simply because I don't work in the program.

What I would say is that the questions you're asking here speak to, if you will, the transparency that comes out by describing this chemical management plan. And then having to report across the whole government how much progress we're making in reducing the risks to Canadians and to the environment from toxic substances would help parliamentarians in providing, I believe, their rendering accountability to our work, and also providing us with guidance by suggesting we've missed, for example, uranium. I don't know where uranium is on the list, but that's an example of the kind of input that can come from this kind of process.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: For instance, could a standing parliamentary committee such as the natural resources committee contact you directly and request certain information?

[English]

Mr. Michael Keenan: Yes, absolutely. Again, I'm probably one of the worst people at Environment Canada to respond to questions on the chemical management plan, simply because I don't work directly —

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: That was just an example, but it could be another committee.

Mr. Michael Keenan: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Do you include other types of projects? As I was saying earlier, there are three pillars to sustainable development. If the government were to ask you to assess or issue an opinion of a wind energy project, would you do that?

[English]

Mr. Michael Keenan: I'll clarify a couple of points.

The first is that sustainable development does have three pillars, as the member has indicated. However, the purpose of the Federal Sustainable Development Act is actually highly focused on the environmental pillar, and that's indicated in section 3, where it says that the purpose of the act is to “provide the legal framework for developing and implementing a...strategy that will make environmental decision-making more transparent and accountable”. It is for that reason that the goals and the targets in the implementation strategies are all focused on the environment. It's driven from the purpose of the act.

The second dimension here is that this strategy brings together a wide range of programs and activities across 32 federal government departments and puts them into a coherent picture. So depending upon what the activity is—and it provides great transparency as to what activities relate to what results—the question would be directed to any one of the 32 departments.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: However, if we get back—

[English]

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup.*

Mr. Armstrong, the floor is yours.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Keenan and Mrs. Weber, for attending committee. I very much enjoyed the presentation and your very articulate response.

It's good to see that accountability measures are included in the strategy, and I believe the whole-of-government approach is very applicable to making this project work. Thirty-two separate silos all making separate reports would make the implementation of this report immeasurable and as an administrator myself, I always believe that if a goal cannot be measured, it cannot really be achieved. The smart criteria and the continuous review process will support the implementation of this strategy.

My question deals with consultation. The previous system involved little consultation with Canadians and stakeholders. Will that be different in the new system?

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you for the question.

Yes, that's one area of market change under the new system. The act requires that there be an extensive consultation in every three-year cycle of the new system. We have just launched the first such consultation period. It has to run at least 120 days. In addition to having a specific role for the two parliamentary committees and the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, there is a specific role for the sustainable development advisory committee, which we were discussing a few minutes ago. That's a very robust committee with 25 representatives covering every province and territory and key sectors. Among all these different organizations, the mandated stakeholder consultation every three years, there is a pathway of significant engagement and stakeholder consultation as part of this strategy.

It's interesting that we're in, in essence, the end of the first week of this consultation and already I think we've received 20-some submissions online on a range of things. There's good advice there and there's also a lot of comments on the targets. It speaks, I believe, to the transparency that's coming out of this in terms of putting this all together.

• (1635)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you.

A further question. Canadians are concerned about the really important trends in the environment and they want to see cleaner air and water and be assured that nature is being protected. How is this going to be connected to the progress indicators you've set?

Mr. Michael Keenan: That's a great question, and it speaks to the previous example with respect to the clean air agenda. It was very difficult under the former system to find enough information in the 32 sustainable development strategies to even piece together, without the puzzle box, with just the puzzle pieces, any sense of what the government was doing with respect to improving air quality and what results were being achieved.

Under the new system that has been proposed, all the activities are pulled together with respect to air quality. It's an interesting area. It's an area for which the government does not currently have targets. That lack of targets is quite, if you will, transparent in this report, but it's an area where the government is working with provincial governments, ENGOs, and industry to pull together a national set of targets with respect to air quality. In the future reports on results, under this proposed strategy, there would be a very clear and specific accounting of the target for air quality in this country, what has been done to achieve that target, what results have been achieved in those

implementation strategies, and whether they fully achieve the target or fall short.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you.

The Chair: You're done? Thank you, Mr. Armstrong.

Mr. Trudeau, you have the floor.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Keenan, for being here today.

I think a lot of the opposition questions are circling around the same thing, that this seems like a very nice idea, but we're very much worried about the implementation, particularly with regard to what we've seen from this government on commitment to changing behaviours because of negative impacts on the environment.

I think one thing that is of concern that keeps coming back is the fact that this will be driven from the environment ministry more than anything else, and when you get potential conflicts between the finance ministry and what they want to do, just having it coordinated into the expenditure management system may not be enough to drive the political decisions around policy.

What mechanisms are being put into this proposal to make sure that various ministries do respond to and act in consistency with the kinds of sustainable development targets we're talking about?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I think in responding to the question there are two dimensions.

One of them is, I guess, with respect to the role of Environment Canada. Given that the purpose of the act is to make environmental decision-making more transparent for parliamentarians, I would submit that it makes sense for Environment Canada to take the lead in that. We are the department, quite frankly, that cares about that. Our minister is accountable for that and champions that very strongly in government. So we're the ones who have the interest in driving it. I'm the one who drags my colleagues together. I'm the one who has formed a partnership with Treasury Board to get this into the estimates process so there's money connected to it.

But I think your more fundamental question is how this translates into progress. The strategy by which this translates into progress is quite simply transparency. It was difficult to tell where things.... Under the former system, you could read through 32 reports and you would be left wondering what's being done, what's being spent, what's being achieved. It was very difficult to tell. It was virtually impossible in many areas.

By pulling this together and by driving a system that's connected to all of the budget decision-making by the estimates process in Parliament, the information is pulled together and parliamentarians can judge, Canadians can judge easily. They can judge what the government is doing, what it's achieving, and whether or not it's falling short, coming closer, or moving farther away from the goals it's established. It can also see clearly where it has good goals, it has not-so-strong goals, or it is missing goals. Already there have been three or four comments around the table with respect to a target that is missing, a target that needs to be added.

•(1640)

Mr. Justin Trudeau: I think you'll understand, though, the opposition's shared concern that if a measure is going to hold this government to account because of its transparency, I think there's a real worry that the information is not going to become available. I mean, it's one thing for something to be transparent within the government as to what it is they are doing. It's another thing for all parliamentarians to have access—and, much more, the Canadian public—to be able to see the details of what's going into this expenditure management system, for example, and to watch the political wrangling that necessarily goes on behind the scenes as to what kind of compromises one makes.

I understand that the environment ministry is very much focused on the environment, but the silo of the environment ministry being, as my colleague said, the environmental cop means that you're sitting around a cabinet table negotiating with everyone else who has their interests forward. I don't think that basing it in Environment this way is going to give it the weight that's going to be necessary to truly transform the decision-making process at all different sectors of government towards that. I hope it will. I think it's a good idea. I'm just very worried about the capacity to execute.

Mr. Michael Keenan: With respect to the concern that the honourable member has just expressed, I would say that I probably wasn't quite precise when I was talking about transparency. The transparency that we're focused on and the transparency that we're committed to provide as part of this strategy is actually a public transparency. These numbers, these activities, what it adds up to, what it achieves would be in public documents. The government-wide planning document every three years, the government-wide reporting document every three years, the individual departmental estimates document in terms of the reports on plans and priorities, and the departmental performance report will all have to align to this corporate government report every year. The idea is to get this information out there and make it available to parliamentarians so they can hold the government to account and therein influence decision-making.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: That would be a wonderful shift if it were to actually happen.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's great to be a vacationer on this committee, sitting in as a substitute.

Before I get to my question, I was just interested in the comments from across the way, about being worried about the implementation. I think the credibility actually comes from...and my colleague had just talked about it.

I know they may have a little trouble understanding how things actually get done within a timeframe, but within 18 months we've actually got an implementation. We've got a sustainability report here. What drives it is, again, unique; I think right now it's obviously the transparency that will come.

When I read through this and tried to understand the 32 separate silos, anyone who has business sense would know you can never deal with that. It takes a management system. It takes coordination within a department and with a department to come up with a consensus and an approach that can actually be discussed and to then have a report come forward. It's called a whole-of-government picture. It actually makes the departments and agencies accountable to each other rather than just to themselves—i.e., laying it out there and saying, “You know, this is only our point of view. For the rest, the other 31, you're on your own.” That's not the approach that needs to be taken.

I think congratulations should be given to the ministers who have taken the initiative and taken hold of something that sat around for 13 years or however long the time was. It obviously needed repair. The mechanic has come along and we now have a vehicle that is actually running much better. That's not to say it's perfect. That's not to say it's complete. I think the Canadian people obviously recognize that something drastic had to be done.

We now have a strategic approach, which I think is really important. At the start of it, there's reference to inclusion under the theme of shrinking the environmental footprint. We then talk about actually setting the example through government. We have all the other aspects within our economy and across the country. We talk about how we're going to measure it for the environment.

Beginning with the government, could you tell us about the progress on greening operations? Is there anything you can tell us in terms of some type of status for where we are, since as a government we want to have a leading edge?

•(1645)

Ms. Caroline Weber: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the question.

We have been active. Since April 2006, we've actually had in place an approved Treasury Board policy on green procurement. The implementation of the policy was deemed satisfactory by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in his March 2008 report. As a result of this policy, we have completed and have ready green standing offers that are available for use by departments in areas of government spending, including vehicles, fuels, information technology equipment, paper, and furniture.

There's also a Treasury Board directive on the executive fleet, which now requires all vehicles to be four-cylinder, hybrid, or run on alternative fuel. As we replace our fleet, we're replacing it with more environmentally friendly and energy-efficient vehicles.

In terms of new office buildings, they must meet the LEED gold level of performance. In the rare instances when we talk about new construction, there is a certain environmental level that we need to meet or exceed. Some federal buildings actually meet LEED for environmental design. A Public Works and Government Services Canada building was the first LEED gold administrative building north of the 60th parallel. Parks Canada has a building that was the first LEED platinum building in Canada.

The strategy gives us an opportunity to make more progress in those areas and to ensure consistency across the Government of Canada.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Bev Shipley: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have about 10 seconds left.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: We'll move on.

Mr. Watson.

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

Thank you, of course, to the witnesses for appearing.

Just so I understand this—and I'm listening to Mr. Trudeau's questions here—let me see if I've got this. By bringing sustainable development considerations into the EMS system, that in fact makes cabinet the first check in the system rather than a department official or somewhere else, or parliamentarians for that matter. It makes cabinet the very first check in the system.

I'm not a prime minister. I'm not campaigning to be one, either, in case anybody wants to know. But if I were sitting at the top of cabinet, I wouldn't know what's going on in a particular department somewhere way down deep with respect to sustainable development or a commitment that the government may have made. I would become aware of that if cabinet itself were discussing it on an ongoing basis, therefore being able to have the oversight over the government's overall objectives and agenda and commitments in this regard. The FSDS establishes that type of an ongoing system, where the prime minister and his cabinet are talking about these initiatives on an ongoing basis.

Is that a fair assessment? Does it make cabinet, if you will, the first check in the system?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I think it does in a manner. I think the honourable member is right that by bringing it into the expenditure management system, it brings it more directly into those decision-making things, the deliberations of cabinet informed by memorandum to cabinet, the deliberations of Treasury Board informed by Treasury Board submissions.

In my experience, those issues are currently deliberated in cabinet when the relevant issue goes. What happens now is that it takes sometimes a Herculean effort on the part of officials to pull together the information to give ministers a decent picture of what's happening, what's being spent, and what results are being achieved. This makes that a much easier task and it makes it more of a normal course of events.

The assistant secretary of the Treasury Board Secretariat under the expenditure management system is always striving to make sure there's better expenditure management information in cabinet deliberations. By linking it in, we bring more of this information into those deliberations and so make this a more central part of government decision-making, as the member indicated. The goal of transparency here is, as I've mentioned, outside transparency, so Parliament can hold the government to account, but it actually makes

the information more available for internal decision-making at the same time.

• (1650)

Mr. Jeff Watson: Theoretically, at least, that can occur on a more frequent basis as estimates are put forward. Departmental officials can be questioned on progress as well with respect to sustainable development throughout a year instead of having to wait, say, a year, or wait for the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to issue a report and then question the commissioner on something like that. This can be done on a much more frequent basis.

Mr. Michael Keenan: The honourable member is exactly right. The first departmental sustainable development strategy will come into force in 2011-12. When the government comes to seek supply from Parliament in 2011-12, the part IIIs, the reports on plans and priorities, would include in them very specific demarcation of the spending request and how it relates to sustainable development targets as fully described in the government-wide federal sustainable development plan.

So when committees are going through the estimates, that information would actually be in front of you on a yearly basis.

Mr. Jeff Watson: So does it create the additional impetus for government to fill in the gaps as well between here and there? You've talked about, of course, that not all goals, targets, and implementation strategies are included at the moment in the discussion document that we're talking about. But you have mentioned that it's forcing the government, if you will, or creating some impetus on the government to accelerate work in certain areas. More of those gaps will be filled in with subsequent reports, presumably, because of the process itself. Is that a fair assessment?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I think the answer is yes—with a bit of a comma. I think the member's absolutely right that what this does is it creates transparency on where there are strong targets, where there are weak targets, where there are no targets. It creates transparency over time where the implementation strategies may not necessarily perfectly align to the targets, so there's a little accountability discussion to be had about what's happening here.

Our sense is already that the transparency created by releasing this paper is focusing the minds a little bit, if you will, in terms of let's proceed on our government work, in whatever domain, to fill in the blank.

As I had mentioned before, this document indicates there currently are not national air quality targets, but the government is working in a collaborative process with provincial governments, under the rubric of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, with ENGOs, and with industry, seeking to establish shared national targets by all governments. Then they would automatically be read in, if you will, to the strategy and then we would start reporting on progress against those targets.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Before we kick off our third round, I just have a couple of quick questions I want to ask.

In your presentation you talk about the establishment of a sustainable development office. Is there any timeframe on when that might happen, or is it going to be decided after the consultations are complete in July?

Mr. Michael Keenan: We have de facto created a sustainable development office. I'm the assistant deputy minister of the strategic policy branch, and within my branch I brought together two directorates, the directorate responsible for the Canadian environmental sustainability indicators program and the sustainability directorate. I brought them together to create, with the existing resource base, a larger directorate, and that directorate is the federal sustainable development office. That's the group that organizes, has prepared the material to date, and is driving the cross-government work in terms of all of the supporting analysis and documentation required to deliver on the strategy.

So it's in place. In fact, in the consultation draft you can see the request is made to send input and advice into the sustainable development office.

•(1655)

The Chair: When we get down the road here and we start actually looking at reporting—I'm looking at theme four, which is about shrinking the size of the environmental footprint that government makes—the reporting would be that we've taken so much greenhouse gas emissions out of the air, so many tonnes, and paper usage by departments....

Would you report that by department or generally, as overall by the government?

Ms. Caroline Weber: Both, ultimately. The thing that this really does change is that instead of those very different and disparate departmental reports with a lot of challenge by anyone in terms of rolling it up, we're all agreeing as part of this process across the Government of Canada to report in certain areas and use certain indicators.

Again, that's the work currently ongoing in terms of figuring out what indicators we can all produce and report against. It will be that commonality you'll see in our reports on plans and priorities and in our departmental performance reports.

The annual reports we have to produce anyway are going to include this information. Then also there will be the three-year report required by the legislation that then rolls it up and reports on progress.

The Chair: Great. Thank you.

We'll do about a four- to five-minute round here per party.

Mr. McGuinty, perhaps you want to kick us off there.

Mr. David McGuinty: Thanks, Chair.

I want to go back maybe just to clear the record on the revisionist history coming from some of the members of the government.

Mr. Keenan, do you recall which government actually created the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development? Which government legislated that posting into existence?

Mr. Michael Keenan: As I understand it, the legislation that created the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development came into force in 1995.

Mr. David McGuinty: Right: the former Liberal government. It was the former Liberal government, if I recall, that brought in the first sustainable development strategies on a line-by-line basis—27, 30 departments and agencies with eight cross-cutting themes, which has been in place since that time. Is that right?

Mr. Michael Keenan: The former system of sustainable development strategies, replaced by the Federal Sustainable Development Act, came in with the same legislative amendments that created the commissioner.

Mr. David McGuinty: Right: by the former Liberal government. I understand.

Can you help Canadians understand who actually started the Canadian environmental indicators project, launched it, and then funded Statistics Canada specifically to deal with the indicators?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I believe that program—I think the honourable member may know the history better than I do—was created based on the advice of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy with respect to indicators. I believe it has had approximately a 10-year run, which would put it back in the late nineties in terms of when it was launched.

Mr. David McGuinty: Right: the former Liberal government.

Who brought in the first greening of government operations, with the greening of the procurement, including the "House in order" measures for the federal government?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I would turn to my colleague on that.

Mr. David McGuinty: Ms. Weber.

Ms. Caroline Weber: I think it was pre-2006.

Mr. David McGuinty: Right.

Thank you very much. I just wanted to get the record straight.

I have a question for you, as well, to deal with the eco-efficiency metrics that the former Liberal government designed for Canada. It became Canada's major contribution to the OECD and it is now, I think, the golden standard for the OECD. That has to deal with water, materials, and energy intensity. These eco-efficiency metrics were delivered to the government in 2006. They were supposed to continue in terms of their funding and their research, in partnership with the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, but that was cut in the 2006 budget as part of the \$5.6 billion of cuts in climate change initiatives.

I'd like to know how you see those eco-efficiency metrics. You say you have a big team, Mr. Keenan. I'd like you to tell us how the eco-efficiency metrics that the OECD is pursuing are going to be used and translated here, particularly on water intensity, materials intensity, and energy intensity. How are we going to apply those metrics to the government's operations, particularly as we look to green government's operations, procurement and otherwise? Can you help us understand? Do you know where that's been left off since 2006 when it was given to the government?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I guess both the benefit and curse of having a large team is that you actually can't bring the sum of all of their knowledge to bear at any one point in time. I have an extremely limited specific knowledge about those particular eco-efficiency metrics. I am aware that the OECD is doing a body of good work, which I think they now brand as something called resource productivity—

• (1700)

Mr. David McGuinty: Yes.

Mr. Michael Keenan:—which is the efficiency by which you use resources. I would say the analytical frame around that is a useful one, and it informs indirectly any number of environmental economic policy analysis elements that we do.

We're increasingly beginning to look across the life cycle in terms of the environmental footprint of products. And life cycle is not a new concept, but I think there's now greater and greater information available in order to do life cycle analysis to evaluate the overall, I would say, resource efficiency of the environmental footprint of consumption and production. That flows into the thinking behind the chemical management program and a number of other policy areas in Environment Canada—

Mr. David McGuinty: Sorry, I have 10 seconds left, Mr. Keenan, and I wanted to remind Canadians who might listen or read these transcripts that it was Minister Copps who convened and launched the eco-efficiency metrics for Canada, which became the architecture of the OECD's eco-efficiency metrics. I think Canada should be proud of that contribution.

Furthermore, it was Mr. Godfrey, the Liberal member of this committee, who introduced this legislation that we're debating here today.

So when the government members get spurious in their allegations about doing nothing, I think it's important for Canadians to know just how much we're building on the shoulders of successive governments, including Mr. Mulroney's.

Thanks very much, Mr. Keenan.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor, Mr. Bigras.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to come back to chapter 4 of the 2008 report of the Commissioner of the Environment. In points 4.7 and 4.8 of the report's main points, we note a commitment by your department to conduct a review in order to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of different departments in terms of their sustainable development strategies. In May of 2008, you informed the commissioner that you had completed part of the review, that you had developed a log and that the review would be completed in October 2008. To help us understand this strategy, have you completed the review that the commissioner recommended be undertaken? Would it be possible for the committee to get a copy of that review?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Keenan: In response to the member's question, there are two elements.

The first is that in developing the proposed federal sustainable development strategy, a lot of work went into looking at the weaknesses of the existing system. Part of the review of the weaknesses included very careful consideration of the multiple criticisms the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development made not only in 2007 and 2008 but all the way back to 2001. What you see in terms of the proposal reflects our attempt to address both the criticisms and the recommendations of the commissioner in the last, I would say, seven or eight reports, stretching from about 2001 to 2008.

The second thing is that in terms of the pulling together of these assessments, I do not have such an assessment with me. I'll go back and check to see if there's information I could provide to that effect. I just don't have it with me.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: As I recall, the review in question was scheduled to be completed by October 2008 and was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the different strategies. In May 2008, you informed the Commissioner of the Environment—and this is mentioned in point 4.7 of the main points—that a portion of the work had been completed, that is that a log had been developed and that the review should be completed by October 2008. According to this report: “The Department also told us it was on schedule to finalize the review by October 2008.” My question is as follows: have you completed the review and would it be possible for the committee to get a copy of it?

Secondly, I would like to know whether in the act—

• (1705)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Keenan: My apologies to the honourable member. The period of 2008 was a period of great transition in this domain as a result of the passage of the Federal Sustainable Development Act. So the work that was happening, in terms of assessing the weaknesses to deal with the frustrations.... At some point, I think the commissioner in one of his reports expressed frustration at the poor quality of the sustainable development strategy under the former system. That work, about evaluating those weaknesses, morphed into the work of creating a system for the future that would deliver on the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

My colleague behind me is nodding that we did actually complete the assessment.

We'll strive to find that document and provide it to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I understand.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Keenan: I apologize, but I joined the department after that work was done.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: No, it's all right. I can understand your not having it.

My second question concerns the Sustainable Development Advisory Council. According to the act, the council is comprised of representatives of each province. On looking at the list of members that you sent us, I see that one of the Quebec representatives is Mr. Gilles Godard of the Quebec Used Oil Management Association. The second representative, Mr. Robert Dubé, appears to be the president of an environmental personnel recruitment firm. I'm not sure who exactly he is representing. I have nothing against the individuals who were selected, but I want to know if you consulted with the provinces prior to making the appointments? I don't think that the director general of a used oil management association or the president of a personnel recruitment firm faithfully represent Quebec's interests on the council. My question is as follows: Were the representatives supposed to be Quebec government officials, or officials of companies that have their head offices in Quebec and an address in Quebec and who will speak for Quebec on the advisory council? I'm not sure if you understand my question.

[English]

The Chair: Time has expired.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Can he answer the question?

[English]

The Chair: Again, those are government appointees, though.

Were they done by order in council?

Mr. Michael Keenan: No, they were done under the authority of the Minister of the Environment.

The Chair: Okay.

So it was the minister himself who made those appointments. I'm sure you'll have to talk to the minister if you want to get more background on those individuals.

Did you want to respond to any of the other comments made by Monsieur Bigras?

Mr. Michael Keenan: We'll endeavour to provide the report that the member was seeking.

I will say that a fair bit of effort went into the appointment of the 25 members of the committee and there's a pretty high level of confidence that we'll receive good direction and good advice from those members during the consultation period.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just for the committee's information, the environment commissioner will be appearing on April 1 to talk about his comments on the federal sustainable development strategy.

Ms. Duncan, we're down to the last five or six minutes, so I may cut you off at about three or three and a half minutes.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I have a few brief questions.

Mr. Keenan, I'm looking at this other document, "A Guide to Green Government", which I think is affiliated. Unfortunately, there are no page numbers, but under section 2 it talks about "Planning and Decision-Making for Sustainable Development", and then it talks about policy tools.

I'm puzzled. I would encourage you to adjust the document, because it makes no reference to the enforcement and compliance strategies and policies that are already in place in departments. The reason I'm mentioning this is that departments don't have broad access to those tools. They're already prescribed very clearly, and to the credit of the government, because that came about when the first CEPA was tabled. Minister Tom McMillan actually tabled the first enforcement compliance policy, which triggered similar policies across Canada. I think it's really important to reference that.

The other matter that you might want to reference is the commitment Canada has made under the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation. I think it's article 5 of that agreement which states that Canada commits to effective environmental enforcement. There have been a lot of agreements under that. In fact, when I was the head of law and enforcement there, I led a whole dialogue and agreement on how the three governments were going to measure and report on effective enforcement and compliance. My understanding is that the department developed that almost 10 years ago.

I think it gives credibility to this to reference documents and the good work departments have already done. You don't have to reply. I'm just pointing that out.

On page 25 of your draft strategy, "Protecting Nature", I'm a little concerned with article 5.1.1, "Enabling Capacity". DFO is reporting that they'll develop 100% of recovery strategies under mandated requirements by 2012. In fact, in many cases, that may mean they're not in compliance with the law because they are actually not complying with requirements, so it's a little awkward there to say that they're going to comply with this instead of what the law requires. Actually and amazingly, SARA prescribes deadlines for when they have to produce these strategies and so forth.

I have one other point. You said that actually it'll be in... I think the document is useful because it points out areas that aren't there yet, where we don't have targets. One of the things I noticed under the section on water is that there is no target for or mention whatsoever of dealing with lakes and rivers. It talks about quality, but it doesn't talk about management, except for the Great Lakes. I would have hoped.... There is some kind of vague thing towards the end about things to do, but it doesn't actually mention what the government will do under the Canada Water Act, let's say, where they have a lot of powers to manage waters.

Also, it doesn't mention where they might be stepping up the monitoring programs in the field in specified areas. For example, we looked at the impact of the tar sands on water, and there are going to be recommendations out of this committee, but I would have anticipated that they would have said they're going to do something—that they're going to do targeted rivers or lakes or something. There doesn't seem to be anything there outside of the Great Lakes that talks about targeting.

You know, there used to be a huge program in Environment Canada called the Canada Water.... Does anybody remember what it was called? It was done away with. There is increasing pressure on the federal government, particularly for transboundary waters or where there is some kind of international obligation. What is the government doing? It's not always Environment Canada. Sometimes it's DFO and so forth. I was kind of surprised that there was nothing there at all, particularly in view of the review we've been doing in this committee.

I'm finished.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I do want to give some time to Mr. Warawa unless you have a comment or something to add, Mr. Keenan.

Mr. Michael Keenan: I have a quick response. I think I see transparency at work here, and I thank the honourable member for these observations and the advice. I think they're valuable. I'll carry them back. I'm also going to talk to DFO colleagues about their timeline.

The Chair: Also, I would just say that on the water strategy, there's more than just the Great Lakes. There's Lake Winnipeg—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: —the greatest of the great lakes.

Mr. Warawa, will you take us to the bells, please?

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. McGuinty was quite right that it was a previous Liberal government that appointed the Commissioner of the Environment. I had a chance to review some of the summary reports that the commissioner did provide to Parliament on that. Back in 1998 she said:

the federal government is failing to meet its policy commitments.

In 1999 she said there's:

additional evidence of the gap between the federal government's intentions and its domestic actions.

In 2000 she said the government:

continues to have difficulty turning that commitment into action.

In 2001 she said:

The continued upward trend of Canada's emissions demonstrates that the government has not transformed its promises into results.

In 2002 she said the government's:

sustainable development deficit continues to grow

In 2003 she said:

My review found a gap between the commitments made and the results achieved.

Good intentions are not enough.

In 2004 she said: Why is progress so slow? I am left to conclude that the reasons are lack of leadership, lack of priority, and lack of will.

In 2005 she said: When it comes to protecting the environment bold announcements are often made and then often forgotten as soon as the confetti hits the ground.

Mr. Speaker, the current leader said:

I think our party has gotten into a mess on the environment

I guess the important question is, why couldn't Mr. Godfrey get his sustainable development legislation through under a previous Liberal government? Mr. Speaker, it's because we're a government of action and getting it done.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

The bells are going to go off any minute.

On that note, we're all having fun here, that's great.

I'll thank both Ms. Weber and Mr. Keenan for appearing today. It gives us the background that we need to continue on with our review of the strategy and provide our comments to you as you move forward with the public consultation and other consultations the government is undertaking.

With that, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

I got it. The meeting is adjourned.

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