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Chair

Mr. Bob Mills

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC)): Order, please.

Just to let members know, on Monday, May 5, we're planning to have the environment minister from New Brunswick. I understand that New Brunswick is having some problems at this point, so we may have to have him via teleconference. There could be some problems because of the flooding that's going on there. So we have been notified about that.

Also, I have had the request from Mr. Regan that we should have a steering committee meeting. I think that's a good idea. Where that would fit really well is on Wednesday, May 7, because the Auditor General and the new Commissioner of the Environment can stay 90 minutes, which is an hour and a half. So my suggestion is that the steering committee meeting be the last half an hour. If we need longer, we can certainly arrange that.

So we would have our witnesses for Monday, we would have.... Did I do that wrong again?

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): I have to add a second “e” in here. That's what I need to do.

The Chair: You have to do that, yes. You need to do that. Change your name.

Anyway, the steering committee could be Wednesday, and we could then look at the schedule through to the third week in June. Does that meet with everybody's approval?

Mr. Bigras, does that work for you?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): I have no objection to our meeting on Wednesday, but I would like you also to consider—and we will be talking about this at the Steering Committee meeting—the fact that Bill C-469 is still on our list of things to do. I simply want to remind you of that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, we did consider that when I mentioned the suggested plan at the last meeting. That certainly is up front there, and we can probably deal with that fairly quickly.

Anyway, we'll have a steering committee meeting, then, next Wednesday. We'll send out a notice.

Mr. Bigras, I know you have a notice of motion, which we would also deal with on Monday.

We'll go to Mr. Warawa.

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

The first point of concern I have is that we receive these in a timely fashion. This has come up before. It would be really helpful if we had these handouts before we actually hear from the witnesses so we can read them and be prepared. I think Mr. Meadowcroft, from Carleton, would like us to read before we hear from him. So if it's possible, we should do it for future witnesses. It's too late for today.

We have one more group of witnesses, which is next week. Have we determined who those witnesses are going to be? That's my first question. If we have, could we please put out a request to have the handouts ready?

The Chair: I should defend the clerk at this point.

When witnesses are invited, we always say that if they have written material, we need it to be in the clerk's hands as soon as possible so we can deliver it to the members and they can read it ahead of time. I can only say that in 15 years here, that request has probably been made four or five times every single year.

Again, we try, and I know the clerk tries, to live with that, and for various reasons, many times it doesn't happen. I know that Norm will make that request each time and try to do that.

The big thing, too, is to get it translated. It can't be handed out until it's translated. Many times we get it in only one official language, so there's time lost getting it translated and so on.

But that's a reasonable request. I know that many years I would have loved to have the stuff two or three days ahead of time. We'll make that request, but I won't promise that we'll always have the material.

Did you also know—maybe you weren't here yet—with respect to Monday, that we are a little bit concerned about Minister Haché from New Brunswick? Because of the flooding of the river, the legislative assembly hall there is now under water. There's quite serious flooding going on there. So there is a slight problem. We may have one witness live and one, hopefully, by at least phone or whatever.

● (1535)

Hon. Geoff Regan: So it isn't just MPs who are all wet. Is that what you're saying?

The Chair: That's correct. There are both MLAs, or whatever they're called in New Brunswick, MNAs, and MPs who are quite often all wet.

The other witness is from Sweden, to talk about sustainable development.

I should note, too, that in talking to the Chinese a little bit further, they're very interested in knowing how an environment committee operates, how an environment commissioner operates, and what we can teach them in terms of how you set up a committee like this. I'm not sure that we want to show them a video clip of how our committee operates; that could be a little dangerous, and we may well create the wrong impression.

An hon. member: Just don't show them question period.

The Chair: Anyway, we will have a steering committee next Wednesday at the end of the Auditor General's report and the commissioner's appearance. That would be the last half hour of that meeting next Wednesday.

Mr. Mark Warawa: There is one further item, then. We're meeting on Wednesday. The evening of May 8 is still the deadline for—

The Chair: The late afternoon of May 8 is the deadline for any amendments you want to make to Bill C-474. Does everybody have that date as well?

We'll send out a notice about this.

Mr. Mark Warawa: If the deadline is May 8, we then will receive them on May 9, so that we'd have the weekend to work with them. Is that correct?

The Chair: Can we promise that?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Normand Radford): I can't. It depends, Mr. Chair, on the number of amendments we receive.

The Chair: So again, the answer would be the number of amendments and the detail of those amendments, and of course they have to be in both official languages. The package has to be put together so that we can proceed with clause-by-clause. Certainly the attempt will be made to get them in your hands as far in advance of 3:30 on Monday as possible.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Well, Chair, we're meeting on May 7, after the committee, to come up with the subsequent schedule of what we're going to do. Then the next day, the 8th, which is a Thursday, would be the deadline.

I would welcome maybe speeding up when they have to be in by, because I think it's really important. If we're going to be starting clause-by-clause and we want this to proceed in an efficient way, we have to have the amendments available for the weekend for us to have a chance to review them.

The Chair: How about having the amendments ready by the 7th? We chose the 8th simply because that would give everybody a little bit longer, but with the 7th, Norm, we could get them out by Friday and then have them for the weekend.

Do I have any discussion on the deadline being the 7th, moving it up one day?

An hon. member: Sold.

The Chair: Okay. So now, not on the 8th but on the 7th, we'll have all the amendments in.

We'll send out a notice of these items, just so everybody knows.

To our guests, again, welcome. We're certainly pleased that you could join us and help us prepare for our clause-by-clause next week and the amendments that members are interested in making. So we are talking about the structure.

As listed here, we'll start with Mr. James Mitchell, please. If you take about 10 minutes or less, that will leave lots of time for our members.

● (1540)

Mr. James Mitchell (Founding Partner, Sussex Circle Inc.): Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me here. As I indicated to the clerk, I do not have an opening statement, which is why your members do not have in hand an opening statement in both languages.

I could say just a little bit about myself and why I suspect I may have been invited here. And I'm very pleased to be here.

I am the head of a small consulting firm in Ottawa that does policy and organizational work for the Government of Canada. It has existed for 14 years. Before that, I was a senior official in the Privy Council Office, concerned with matters of government organization.

So my work both inside and outside government is largely focused on the workings of the federal government, and it was in that capacity that I served recently as a member of the green ribbon panel that was appointed by the Auditor General to look at the mandate given to the AG on matters of environment and sustainable development.

I served very happily as a member of that three-person panel. We made a report in December, which is a public document, which I think the committee is aware of, and recently, as you obviously know, the Auditor General appointed a new commissioner.

So I'm here, obviously, at the committee's disposal, not as an expert on environmental matters, although I've certainly learned a fair bit about them in doing my work as a member of the green ribbon panel, but more, I suspect, as someone who has lots of experience in the working of the federal government.

That's all I'd like to say.

The Chair: Great. Thank you.

We'll move now to Mrs. Karen Wilson.

Mrs. Karen Wilson (Assistant Chief Statistician, National Accounts and Analytical Studies Field, Statistics Canada): Thank you for inviting us here today. I am from Statistics Canada, as is my colleague Robert Smith. We would like to make a brief presentation about our environmental statistics program. Then we'll be happy to answer any questions. If that's all right, I will turn it over to my colleague Robert Smith, who is the director of our environment statistics program.

Mr. Robert Smith (Director, Environment Accounts and Statistics Division, Statistics Canada): Thank you for the invitation to speak to you today. We thought it would be useful to inform the committee about Statistics Canada's current work on environmental statistics accounts and indicators and also to give the committee some sense of Statistics Canada's role in the world of data collection.

Statistics Canada's role in the world of data provision is simply to provide credible, neutral information at arm's length from government in support of defined policy priorities. We're committed to three central things: transparency in everything that we do; adherence to established and publicly known quality standards; and freedom from any sort of interference, real or perceived, from any particular stakeholder group.

With this in mind, let me tell you a little bit about our environmental statistics program. We've been working on environmental statistics since the 1970s, which is probably something that many people don't know. So it's not a completely new program, but it is new in the sense that it has expanded a lot in the last 10 years or so.

The program today contains four broad elements connected to what we do on environment statistics: (1) a growing set of environmental surveys; (2) a set of environmental accounts, where we take data from a variety of different sources, some from our surveys but also some from other departments, and organize them in a fashion that makes them coherent with economic and other statistics; (3) some environment and sustainable development indicators that we compile jointly with Environment Canada and Health Canada; and (4), a number of analytical products that we produce regularly.

We think of ourselves as having a broad mandate to cover essentially all linkages between human activity and the environment. But we try to focus on the immediate linkages between human activities and the environment. We generally steer clear of measures that would be considered purely environmental, such as concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. We don't get engaged in compiling that kind of information. Occasionally, however, we report that kind of information in some of our analytical products.

We have with us a list of our expanding set of environmental surveys. Roughly half of the surveys in the list are what I would call well established surveys, ones that we've been running for a number of years now. The other half are more or less new surveys that we started in the last couple of years. I'll flag the new ones for you: the household survey, where we ask households about their environmental behaviours; some new surveys on energy use; a new survey on water use; a new survey on water quality; a new survey, still in the design stage, on industrial pollution emissions. The last three—solid waste management, environment-related expenditures, and environmental technologies—are all surveys we've been doing for about the last 10 years. They are quite established and robust at this point.

I like to describe our environmental accounting program as being about three Cs: consistency, comprehensiveness, and coherence. When we build environmental accounts, we're trying to create structured environmental databases that are consistent over time—that is, they present variables that are measured the same way year after year. This is important for time series analysis. We try to present accounts that are comprehensive. For example, if we measure greenhouse gases in our account, we try to account for all the sources of greenhouse gases, not just some.

● (1545)

Coherence is important as well. We try to make our environmental accounts internally coherent so that different elements of the accounts speak to other parts of the accounts. But perhaps more importantly, we try to make our environmental accounts coherent with the economic accounts that are really central to Statistics Canada's work, and we think that's quite important. Linking the environment and economy through a set of statistics can lead to quite powerful analytical possibilities.

In terms of the kinds information we can get out of this set of environmental accounts, there are really three main areas. One is stocks of natural capital; so we measure timber and water and land and minerals and oil and gas, and so on, in both physical and monetary terms. Second is the use of natural capital as a source of raw materials and a sink for the wastes produced by economic activity. And third, the accounts provide estimates of expenditures undertaken by businesses and governments and households to protect natural capital.

The third broad element of the program is a set—a small set, I would say—of environmental sustainability indicators. These are produced jointly, as I said, with Environment Canada and Health Canada. They've been published since 2005, and three indicators are published. One is a more or less standard indicator of greenhouse gas emissions. The second is a less standard, slightly more interesting indicator of air quality, namely, a population-weighted average of ground-level ozone and fine particulate matter concentrations. And the third is not in fact one indicator but more than 300 indicators, one to measure water quality at each of the various sites across the country where water quality is measured by the federal and provincial governments.

And finally, we have two analytical reports that we prepare on a regular basis. The first is a report that we've been doing for many, many years; in fact, it dates right back to the 1970s. It's called *Human Activity and the Environment*, an annual compendium of general reference data on the environment. Each year we also do an in-depth statistical portrait of a particular environmental issue in the compendium. So if you were to look at the recently released 2008 edition of this publication, you would see that its thematic article covered climate change. And we've done a variety of other issues; we've covered transportation and the environment, water, energy and the environment, and a number of others.

The second analytical report is a new one for us. It's one that we've only started publishing recently, and it is actually a quarterly bulletin of environmental statistics focused really on analytical output, with short analytical studies on environmental issues. For example, we did a little study recently on greenhouse gas emissions; but rather than looking at emissions from the standard perspective of who's producing them, we looked at emissions from the perspective of what demand for products is actually leading to the emissions of greenhouse gases. So that turned the traditional greenhouse gas emissions story a little bit on its head.

Like all programs, the program has strengths and weaknesses. I like to think there are more strengths than weaknesses—but some days, I'm not so sure. If you look at the strengths, I think the program is well founded conceptually. What I mean by that is that in some sense we know what we'd like to be measuring in terms of the environment and the economy, and what we'd like to be measuring is quite consistent with international best practices in environmental statistics. Also, we have in place the basic building blocks of that environmental information system. We have a good and expanding set of surveys; we have a set of environmental accounts; and we have some environmental indicators.

But the gaps in the program are not insubstantial, and I've listed some of them here. And I would emphasize that this isn't really a comprehensive list, but includes some of the more important gaps.

We don't know as much about water quantity and water quality as we should.

We don't know very much about fish, and when I say “we”, I'm talking about Statistics Canada. I'm not necessarily labelling the Government of Canada as being ignorant about fish in general; certainly DFO knows quite a lot about fish, but I'm talking about what we've done in terms of our environmental statistics and accounts.

Air pollution is not nearly as well covered in the system as it should be. Neither is water pollution. Land areas, other than agricultural and urban land, are not well covered. And ecosystems are, I would say, practically not covered at all.

So those are some of the gaps that exist.

● (1550)

Finally, I'll simply leave you with a thought about how Statistics Canada could fit in, in a broader role, with respect to sustainable development information. I'll simply say that StatsCan is prepared to provide whatever data the government may require for reporting on sustainable development, and of course we do so in keeping with our principles as an arm's-length supplier of statistics and information.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair. Thank you for your time.

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

Mr. Meadowcroft, please.

Dr. James Meadowcroft (Research Chair in Governance for Sustainable Development, Carleton University, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me here today.

I'm going to make four or five opening points. I'm sorry I couldn't have a written presentation, but the time between my invitation and my appearance was too rapid to allow the production of a written document.

I'll start by saying a few things about myself, because this is the first time that I've met most of you.

My speciality is governance for sustainable development. In other words, how do you reform the structures and processes of government in order to promote environmental and sustainable development issues? I've a BA in political science from McGill, a PhD from Oxford. For many years I lived in the United Kingdom—20 years—where I was at the department of politics, in Sheffield, which is one of the top three or four political science schools in the U.K. I've been back in Canada for not quite four years, and I'm now at Carleton University, where I have a Canada research chair in governance for sustainable development. So the sorts of things that you're talking about here are exactly the kinds of things I write articles about and go to conferences about and so on.

Basically what I'm interested in particularly is advanced industrialized countries. Of course, sustainable development is also about developing countries, but I'm interested in the rich countries and how, over the past 20 years, the rich countries have begun to adjust governance structures and processes and policy in order to deal with a new set of emerging challenges. In particular, my work over the last few years has been concentrated around the sustainable energy policy and climate change. For instance, I'm working on an international project now on carbon capture and storage, where we're comparing the politics and policy of carbon capture and storage in about seven developed countries plus the European Union as a unit.

So that's me.

Now I just want to make a few general comments, but I hope that in the questions there'll be a chance to pursue some more details and so on with the matter that you have before you.

The first thing I want to say is that I think it's fairly clear that in the next few decades—three decades, four decades, five decades—we have to effect a fundamental transformation in the way the economies and societies interact in developed countries. Modern environmental policy dates from about 1968 to 1970. In those four decades since that time—just about four decades—an enormous amount has been accomplished in the developed countries. On the other hand, overall, the human burden placed on ecosystems continues to grow and many measures of global environmental equality are deteriorating, though there are specific improvements in specific places dealing with specific problems, particularly the problem of climate change.

The most recent estimates suggest that probably the rich countries have to reduce their emissions by something like 80% to 90% over the next four and a half decades. That means a significant industrial transformation. In that transformation government has an important role to play. Government isn't the whole story, but there are things governments can do to help facilitate the kind of change we need.

It's basically two decades since the Brundtland report first made the idea of sustainable development internationally known, if you want. At least since the Rio Earth Summit governments of most of the countries of the world have formally signed on to this as a good idea. Now, that in itself is remarkable, because new normative principles don't come on to the political agenda and get adopted all around the world very often. Human rights is one, and there's a long story in which human rights gradually became an accepted international norm, which doesn't mean everybody respects human rights. Sustainable development is another example of such an emerging norm.

Now, one key principle—not the only one—of sustainable development is this idea of integration: integrating environmental, social, and economic decision-making or, particularly in the rich countries, integrating the environment into economic decision-making. Everybody signs on to that, but in practice we have enormous difficulty in changing our institutions so that this actually takes place. That is to say we consider all these dimensions early on in the development process. Still, governments around the world are struggling with it, and some progress has been made. I'll just throw out two examples—which you probably all have heard of, but I think are worth mentioning—of institutions trying to move forward in this area of integration and institutionalizing sustainable development.

● (1555)

One, of course, is the recent U.K. climate change bill, where the proposal is to have five-year annual carbon budgets that look forward, basically, to mid-century in terms of the reductions, so there are both a long-term perspective and immediate objectives. Every five years these will be reviewed by Parliament, with an independent agency a bit like the idea of a central bank, though not quite so independent and important, but nevertheless reviewing progress and giving independent judgments.

Another example you've probably heard about is the Swedish national environmental objectives. They have this integrated set of 16 objectives that start out very broad—clean water for all Swedes—but then become very concrete in terms of particular concentrations of substances in different sorts of waters.These are disaggregated across the country, so that each municipality knows what it has to do for the next five or ten years in order to realize this objective.

Sustainable development strategies are another way of embedding this sort of integrative approach. There are lots of different international experiences, with varying degrees of success, with these sorts of sustainable development strategies. Here are just a few things they can accomplish, and you're probably aware of them already, but I think they're important to emphasize.

One is that they allow decision-makers to back off a little bit and look at things from the perspective of the longer term, not just four or five years, but 10, 15, 25 years, or beyond. They also allow the formulation of shared objectives, goals, and targets, so one can measure whether one is moving away or moving towards one's objective. One also can come back later and say, well, we picked the wrong goal, but it's better to do that explicitly and then draw lessons from it. Measurements and monitoring, which we heard about, are very important because they allow you to realize where you're going or not going.

Also sustainable development strategies allow the public to be involved to some extent, because the debates about them are in Parliament and in the press, and to regularly come up to speed and re-interrogate themselves on where we're going.

Finally, I'll mention the iterative character of these strategies. What's important, obviously, is not the strategy document, but a process where political institutions come back and think again about where we're headed and whether that is where we want to go.

For all these reasons, I think the bill you're considering is an important one, and in the questions I'd be happy to be drawn out more on various aspects of how this is exactly formulated.

I do want to add just one little caution, however, which is that although they can do a lot of things, sustainable development strategies are not the answer. It's not as if you get a really good sustainable development strategy process going and everything's going to then get sorted out. There are lots of reasons why this is so. One, of course, is that in a sense political leaders, and including people like you, have to actually take the issues up and care about them. It's quite possible to have a smoothly functioning formal process that is totally meaningless. It just churns out glossy pamphlets every few years, which everybody signs off on and is totally divorced from actually deciding what's important, what the goals are that we want to attain.

● (1600)

I think one other thing to say is that a sustainable development strategy, at least of all the kinds we've seen so far in the developed countries, is not a fully integrated, comprehensive planning process that absorbs all strategic decision-making about the environment. It can't do that. It is a process that goes on that allows *faire le point*, to draw the line under certain things, to focus on certain issues. But of course decision-making is also going on at various layers of government. It's going on with other issues such as climate change, on many specific issues that can eventually be integrated into this process, but they're not subsumed into it by political fiat.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll begin with Mr. McGuinty, please. You have 10 minutes.

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

Thank you very much, witnesses. It's good to see most of you again.

An hon. member: It's good to see them all.

Mr. David McGuinty: It's good to see all of you.

I'd like to get a better perspective—your perspectives, particularly, Professor Meadowcroft and Mr. Mitchell, to begin.

Mr. Mitchell, I think your introduction was far too modest. I've always understood you to be one of the leading authorities on the machinery of government in Canada. Welcome to this committee.

I think we would all recognize that the system as it is presently constituted is imperfect. It's a wonderful start. There has been a lot of investment. We've made great progress. We have a commissioner, for example; most countries don't. We have sustainable development strategies; the vast majority of countries don't. We've made considerable progress, I think, in the last decade or so. I think we also all recognize that there are lingering questions around the connection between the role of the commissioner and the role, for example in this case, of a central agency like the Privy Council Office.

If I could start with you, Mr. Mitchell, we're trying to get a better sense on this side of the table as to whether you believe that as it's presented.... I'm assuming everyone has read this bill thoroughly. I hope the amended version was presented to you. Just so you know, it's chiefly different because we have excised all those passages that call for an independent commissioner. I'm not sure what version was sent by the clerk to you, but—

A witness: There were two versions.

Mr. David McGuinty: Two versions? Okay.

● (1605)

The Chair: Mr. Mitchell, you have a comment.

Mr. James Mitchell: Not to interrupt the member, but it would be great if we could have the very latest version. I know the one I printed off the web has the independent commissioner in it still. That's my own fault.

Mr. David McGuinty: Well, there's still the role of the commissioner in the text you'll be getting here. So we'll proceed.

We're trying to get a better picture of this. We would all agree that the sustainable development strategies have not been perfect. And we've heard it repeatedly.

Mr. Mitchell, you have just had the privilege of performing a great service on the green ribbon panel.

As presented, i.e. this notion of a special committee at PCO, of landing this issue squarely in the Office of the Prime Minister of Canada, and how it then connects to the office of the commissioner and the related and ancillary duties of the commissioner to pick up and do better, can you give us your experienced judgment here? So many of us have felt that the SD reports haven't been grounded in real authority. For that matter, there have been a lot of questions about who's really in charge in the federal system. There has been great reluctance expressed by Environment Canada, for example, over the years about wanting to become the “enviro cop” and driving these issues, and whether it is better to elevate it in PCO, as presented by my colleague Mr. Godfrey.

So I'd like your first reactions, Mr. Mitchell and Professor Meadowcroft, on the structure as presented.

Mr. James Mitchell: Mr. Chair, in responding to Mr. McGuinty's very good question, I want to say that although I'm not a political person I tend to be conservative in my views about how government works—small “c” conservative.

So I must say that in reading the bill—and I'm conscious that the author of the bill is a former minister—I was not keen on seeing a bill that would legislate a cabinet committee, to tell you the truth. Although I can certainly understand the intent of the bill and of course the importance of the issues, and I certainly agree with what Mr. McGuinty has just said about how the SDSs do not seem to be grounded in real authority—there seems to be a lack of a central authority there—I would not favour legislating that allocation of responsibility and that mechanism within the cabinet system to do that. I think that simply ties the hands of a Prime Minister too much, whoever that Prime Minister may be, on how to organize his or her government and how to have decisions taken on these very important matters.

So the short answer to your question, Mr. McGuinty, is that I didn't favour that. I didn't think that was the most effective way of grounding the SDSs in real authority.

Mr. David McGuinty: I'd like to move to Professor Meadowcroft for a first response.

● (1610)

Dr. James Meadowcroft: Yes. I certainly think it's clear that someone in the central agencies needs to be looking after a sustainable development strategy and I think there could be some discussion about exactly where it fits. I think there are advantages in placing it somehow in PCO. The finance ministry might be another place you might put it as well. Treasury Board, I know, has been floated. I would be less enthusiastic about that, because it seems to me it's more *post hoc* rather than *ex ante*.

I'll just say a quick word on the weaknesses of the existing sustainable development strategies. In a word, they're a strategy process that exists in parallel to the real decision-making process of the ministries, and that's a big problem. In fact, the management plan of the ministry being run by the deputy minister should be dealing with sustainable development. In other words, integrate sustainable development into the real decision-making of the ministry rather than set up some kind of parallel thing.

At its most caricatural, and this isn't true in every case, what you get is a collection of young people who have been working for the government for two years who get stuck writing this strategy, with maybe a little senior person to look over them, and they run around and ask anybody if they have anything on their desk they can put in this strategy. Then they write this thing. And it's a strategy, and there is good stuff in there. I'm not saying it's pointless, but the basic ideas of integrating environment and economic and social issues in decision-making are not being done by the leading management board of the ministry.

Mr. David McGuinty: May I follow up, then? Mr. Mitchell, I'm just going to abbreviate your reasoning for not compelling a mandatory committee. I think I can distill it to one word, which is flexibility for future prime ministers and so on.

When you look back at the history of sustainable development—I'm not going to call it a movement, I'm going to call it a transition—the sustainable development transition, when you go back to 1987, 1988, 1992, there was an understanding that if we, as nation states, were going to operationalize this concept in meaningful terms and in meaningful ways, there could only be, in the Canadian context for example, as we signed on to in 1992 under Mr. Mulroney in Rio, one minister with ultimate responsibility for this issue and that had to be the Prime Minister.

Now, if it's not this structure...because, Professor Meadowcroft, I was on the receiving end for five years of kids coming to see me in my office, when I was the president of the National Round Table, begging me to help coach them through their SDS drafting. I can tell you that I completely support what you're saying, and that's exactly where it is today, because I still get the calls.

The question is, if it's not going to be grounded in the central agency of the PCO, which steers and does not row, with ultimate accountability, where will it be grounded?

Mr. James Mitchell: I think you could ground it in an obligation that you put on the government, which of course is headed by the Prime Minister, to produce a sustainable development strategy. You could have a statutory obligation to produce a sustainable development strategy.

What that should look like is something to be discussed. I must say I'm not sure I'm entirely in agreement with the kind of strategy that's set out here. But if you impose that obligation on the government, then I think Mr. McGuinty is right—ultimately you're going to have the Prime Minister dictating what it's going to look like and what it delivers, and you're also going to have the authority of the Prime Minister behind the departmental strategies that fit into it.

Mr. David McGuinty: In Ontario recently, the government recognized that they just couldn't have a situation where everybody's job was going to be nobody's job. So they actually appointed a senior ADM in the premier's office, with responsibility for delivering on climate change commitments—in the centre, steering, not rowing, driving the different ministries.

If this doesn't end up with somebody in charge, everybody's job will become nobody's job. This is the most important 21st century challenge we face, right? National security issues will come and go; natural security issues are with us for centuries.

So why wouldn't we compel this kind of cabinet committee, overseen by the Prime Minister, to make damn sure that we're seriously integrating environmental, economic, and social concerns? If we had a general requirement that a government should produce a sustainable development strategy, I don't see where it would end up. As one member of Parliament said the other day on another issue, so what? Where does it take us if we don't have some place where the golf ball sits down?

Am I missing something, Professor Meadowcroft?

● (1615)

Dr. James Meadowcroft: No, I don't think so. The Norwegian or Swedish Prime Minister—I can't remember which—was asked about why they didn't have a sustainable development committee. “We do,” he said. “It's called the cabinet”. So in a sense I agree with you. I think responsibility for a national strategy, if it really means something, has to be assumed by the leader of the government. It has to go to PCO.

My one equivocation is that I think you could lodge it in Finance, because of the close way that Finance and....

Mr. James Mitchell: I agree with Mr. Meadowcroft that the ultimate cabinet committee for sustainable development is the cabinet. It's chaired by the Prime Minister, and that's where you integrate all of the economic, social, and environmental issues. I simply don't think it's a good idea for Parliament to be legislating precisely how the Prime Minister does the business of the cabinet within that system. I think it loses the flexibility that you need to run the government.

The Chair: Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would also like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

Everyone agrees that we need to establish a sustainable development strategy, and that this strategy must come from the senior levels of government. Unless I am mistaken, 25 years ago, the Prime Minister's Office issued a directive which, in principle, forces departments to carry out a strategic environmental assessment. As far as I know, the directive starts at the top and it is supposed to filter down. You have worked with the Commissioner of the Environment and I still remember the tile of one of the chapters, which was: "Strategic Environmental Assessment". The Department of Finance is dragging its feet. But, the fact is that this directive has been in place for 25 years now, and has been renewed two or three times.

There is a commitment at senior levels, but there is no implementation further down the ladder. So, the question is: we may well talk about a national sustainable development strategy that casts a wide net, but should we not be ensuring that strategic environmental assessment is a legal obligation? There has to be an obligation—not in the form of a directive, but in a form that can give it greater weight. Can you tell me whether, in some countries, such an approach has been favoured as a means of forcing departments to carry out a strategic environmental assessment? We may well talk about strategy, and departments can always develop them, but in actual fact, if there is no legal obligation, I am not convinced it will go very far.

Mr. James Mitchell: Would you like me to respond?

First of all, Mr. Bigras, I don't know whether there are countries where such a legal obligation now exists. Also, I completely agree with you that a legal obligation carries a lot more weight. Finally, I agree with my colleague, Mr. Meadowcroft, when he says that there are two parallel systems. We run the risk of creating a system where departments, because they have an obligation to do something, will do something, albeit not necessarily on the basis of the planning document or the actual assessment. There is always the risk that they will fulfill their obligation formally, but in different ways.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Meadowcroft, what is your view?

Dr. James Meadowcroft: A legal foundation would be a significant improvement. With respect to strategic assessment, it is very uneven; it depends on the country. Countries may use the same terminology, but what happens in actual fact is completely different from one place to the next. I have even seen research on this and it isn't well developed. So, there is no clear answer to your question.

● (1620)

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Do you believe that the environmental assessment process should also apply to the federal tax system? I am always fascinated to note that, as part of different budgets, we pass budget implementation bills that result in a considerable increase, for example, in tax incentives aimed at the oil industry in Canada. The depreciation allowance for pipeline construction has been increased, and these budget implementation bills continue to fall through the cracks, even though when a specific project comes forward in a municipality, environmental assessment is mandatory or almost mandatory. I have the feeling that, when it comes to sustainable development strategies, there is a double standard. Strategic environmental assessment should apply to small projects, but whenever we talk about government plans, policies and programs, it's a different situation altogether.

Do you not see an inconsistency there? That's the reason why we don't have a coherent sustainable development strategy.

Mr. James Mitchell: The goal is what you and my colleagues have referred to: integration. The more tax and environmental measures there are, and the better integrated those various tax and environmental measures are, the greater our opportunity to make the decisions that you described in your remarks. It's a process.

Dr. James Meadowcroft: Integration of environmental concerns with other social and economic issues must occur at several levels and through a lot of different mechanisms. There is no one mechanism that can solve all the problems. A sustainable development strategy is a mechanism. It's important. Strategic environmental assessment is another very important mechanism, but again, that can be done at different levels, and there are also instruments—such as taxes—that can foster linkages between economic decisions and environmental results. I believe what is needed is a multi-level vision and a number of different tools in order to attain that objective.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I have one last brief question for our witnesses from Statistics Canada. I can see that you are doing an excellent job, but on page 8, you also admit that there are gaps in the system. I see that those gaps often occur in areas of federal jurisdiction. I am thinking of water quality, ecosystems, and so on.

What kind of cooperation have you established with the Institut de la statistique du Québec, for example? Is there integration of data that has already been collected in Quebec? Are those data passed on to Statistics Canada? How does it work, in terms of ensuring consistency in the data?

Mr. Robert Smith: Thank you, Mr. Bigras.

The answer to that depends on the statistical area concerned. In the case of social and economic statistics, there is clearly very close cooperation between the Institut de la statistique du Québec, or ISQ, and Statistics Canada. There is practically ongoing data sharing between those two institutions.

However, our collaboration as regards environmental data is only just beginning. I have just signed with the ISQ—I believe it was last week—a data sharing agreement relating to one of our new surveys. The cooperative mechanisms that have been in place in the economic and social fields for a very long time are now starting to be applied to the environmental sector.

In terms of data sharing between the federal government and the provinces with respect to what I would call scientific data—for example, water quality, air quality, and so on—Environment Canada is really the department that enters into such agreements for the purpose of ensuring effective data sharing. To date, Statistics Canada has not been very involved in that. However, because we cooperate with Environment Canada and Health Canada through a project dealing with environmental sustainability indicators, we are now starting to get more involved. At the same time, these cooperative efforts between the federal government and the provinces are still within the purview of Environment Canada.

Does that answer your question?

● (1625)

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Yes, it certainly does.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bigras.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

I'll focus my questions on particularly trying to imagine this bill coming into force and what consequences it would have on the ground. I think sometimes our experiences in the past have been very heavy on the side of grand plans and bold statements about things sustainable and environmental. On the ground there isn't that proof of the politic that decisions are actually passing through an environmental lens and Canadians are seeing it out the other end.

What I'm interested in is trying to build in, if at all possible, any fail-safe measures into the bill, so that five years from now, if this bill were to be law, we would look back and say this was an important piece in making Canada a more sustainable country. I'm not yet convinced that all those fail-safes are there to protect as best we can.

Mr. Mitchell, I wonder if you could comment. What's been the biggest point of failure, to this point, in Canada's efforts to be sustainable, in that gap between the promise of environmental sustainability and the reality of Canada operating in a different way? If you could cite one or two things, what has been the most significant failure that's caused this gap to exist?

Mr. James Mitchell: Mr. Chair and Mr. Cullen, I would say the first is that it's been hard to close the gap between aspiration and reality. As you say, there is that gap. Everybody believes in doing the right thing; I think every government does, and they commit themselves to doing the right thing generally. But as you say, there's a gap between those declared aspirations and what governments actually do, for the multitude of reasons that governments act, often to address a whole complex range of problems and short-term issues that have to be dealt with, in their view, or political issues and so on.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: To narrow in on the environment, is it mostly a financial consideration? Is it some fear that you've watched governments react and resist to making those environmental considerations? What is the thing that most holds us back from following through on doing the right thing?

Mr. James Mitchell: I would say that I don't think successive governments have yet managed to get Canadians to understand the magnitude of the changes that will be required, as my colleagues have just said. You're looking at very significant changes in how our economy works and how our society works, and in people's lifestyles, and how they transport themselves and how they use energy.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So the implication of the promise, then—is that what the gap has been?

Mr. James Mitchell: Yes, I think that's the biggest part of the gap. It's the major reason we haven't done more. A much less important reason, in my view, is finding the precise mechanism to do it. I realize this sounds like witnesses telling politicians that it's the fault of politicians, and I don't want to sound like that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We've heard it before. It's okay if you come to that conclusion.

Mr. James Mitchell: In all seriousness, I think the larger challenge is the public and political one. It's much easier to find mechanisms when you can make progress on the broader public issue.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's interesting. I suppose I'm trying to imagine, again if this bill were to come into existence.... In the past, the consequence of failure, outside of the political, a sustainable promise made and then not kept.... You can say there has been some political cost. Canadians lose faith with the party in government, or parties aren't making the promises in the lead-up to an election. There are some political costs.

But has either of you, Mr. Meadowcroft or Mr. Mitchell—because I think you deal with this most—seen any consequence to anybody within the civil service, up to the deputy minister level, from having failed in applying the directive from the government?

The government says they have an aspirational ambition to go forward on this: energy efficiency and getting Canadians to drive less. Here's the promise; the actual delivery is so much less. I'm wondering about accountability.

I've used this example with other witnesses in the region of finance, which is an interesting conversation about where to place the power of this. When governments have directed the Department of Finance to find cost savings, they've done it overwhelmingly and effectively, because there seems to be some consequence from failure—to one's career or one's paycheque or within the civil service—when it comes to the financial matters. Yet when we turn to environmental matters, I have yet to be able to find, from the Auditor General of Canada to anyone else, one case of anyone finding serious consequence to their career path or their ambitions working within....

Am I getting this wrong? Am I following the wrong path?

● (1630)

Mr. James Mitchell: To give a quick answer, Mr. Cullen, I believe the officials are doing what the government wants them to do, as a general rule, with the exception of very particular cases that you would have seen or that one could talk about. As a general rule, when officials find savings, it's because the government wants them to find savings and they do. When they fail to—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: When they fail on greenhouse gas levels, that's because the politicians want them to do it?

Mr. James Mitchell: Well, the government doesn't want them to find the solution you're looking for.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Meadowcroft, would you agree?

Dr. James Meadowcroft: Yes. It's evident.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So what is the difference, then, with this piece of legislation? This legislation will say, go forth and do sustainable things. Are we simply admitting that the reality of the politic before this legislation will remain the reality of the politic afterwards and that failure will have the same nil consequence to officials?

Dr. James Meadowcroft: I think there's a dialectic between reform and innovation and structure, and on the other hand between political realities and public aspirations and political aspirations. I don't think you want to set the two apart. In other words, if a bill such as this passed, it would indicate that politicians are saying this is something important, and maybe we should give it more importance that it had in the past.

One of the things a sustainable development strategy might do is help in an educational and communicative function by communicating to stakeholders and business and civil society and the public that this is something important, that we're formulating these important goals and trying to work towards them, and so on. There's a back-and-forth between the politician as leader and educator and the politician as someone who executes what people want on the day to meet short-term needs.

I don't think you can oppose it and say there's no point in doing something like this, because we don't really want to change anyway, so it'll be politics as usual, and let's not bother. Rather, I think you have to say, if we think this is a step that will improve the situation, let's take it and try to do better than we've done in the past.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I want to bring this down to the ground and say to Canadians that the reason my party would support this bill is that it will help change the course of things. Of course politic will be politic, and people will make promises and not deliver.

With an issue something like "if we knew then what we know now" about the tar sands, if we had passed it through the lens of this bill, would there have been any consequence and change in the way we've rolled out that energy project? Would we have considered it differently? Or does it again just boil down to the politicians of the day deciding that it's of greater importance than an environmental commitment made beforehand?

Mr. James Mitchell: Mr. Cullen, I don't want to suggest that politicians have entirely failed or that you can't look to politicians for big solutions, because I believe you can. But I think that a bill, whether this one or another one, that tries to get inside government by calling on it to do this and this and this, thinking that this approach will solve the problem, is dramatically less useful than Parliament or individual members calling on the government to take action on the major issues you've identified; and holding the government to account for its failure to address those major issues; and perhaps passing legislation that sends broad statutory guidance to the government, but that doesn't try to get right inside the kitchen and say you have to do it this way, this way, this way.

Taking the issue seriously is a political matter, first of all, and I think that's very important for parliamentarians and the government. Having the right mechanism is partly politics and partly law and partly administration. So I think you're right there.

Then the question is, what do you want to do with that mechanism? What targets and goals are you setting? That's partly political, or partly for parliamentarians, partly for the public and newspapers, and so on—and of course it's for parliamentarians to hold the government to account for not reaching those goals.

● (1635)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This is what we're trying to sift through, because we've had the environment commissioner come before this committee time after time to show us audit after audit, after which the government, even when audited and shown to have been found wanting, claims or promises it will to do better. But when she or he returns to those audits, the government is still found wanting. So the urgency obviously isn't there.

I have a final question for Mr. Smith. Again, I'm trying to break this down to common practicalities. I want to understand where your agency intersects with Environment Canada. There was a submission to the agriculture committee on a very specific government policy, the biofuels policy. In their submission, the government talked about the environmental data not being robust—that was in the title of their deck—and how the numbers and impacts of this policy measure on the environment are not understood.

How does Statistics Canada work with Environment Canada to boost the government's awareness and intelligence of the implications of bills? Do you work independently of it? Does the government send you a question and say, we don't know enough about biofuels and their impacts as between corn and cellulosic biofuel, and can you help us out?

I ask you, would you be willing to do that? This was only a month ago and there's obviously some need.

Mr. Robert Smith: Well, maybe I'll answer the last question first.

Would we be willing to look at something like the economic impacts of biofuels or the environmental impacts as best we could? If asked to do so, certainly we would. Within the limits of the statistics that we have at hand, we would be happy to do that sort of thing.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Does government ask you to do that? Does this committee?

Mr. Robert Smith: I have not been asked to do so on that particular issue.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but I just don't understand the mechanism. Can the committee ask Statistics Canada to look at that, or do these requests usually come from government?

Mr. Robert Smith: The requests come from a variety of stakeholders. There's no particular.... Most of them would come from stakeholders, but there are requests from elsewhere as well.

In terms of how we work with Environment Canada, I think we work quite closely with Environment Canada in a whole bunch of different ways. I don't have time to explain all of them, but suffice it to say that we do work closely with them.

Obviously the kind of thing we look to Environment Canada for is direction on what is important to collect, as we don't want to be the ones deciding what's important to collect. We're happy to collect what policy-makers think is important. That's how we look to departments like Environment Canada to help set that agenda in terms of what needs to be collected in terms of environmental information.

And we've done that by using various mechanisms. I've been at it now for 15 years, and at various points during those 15 years we've had fairly intensive discussions on what needs to be collected.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Warawa, please.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you.

I also want to thank the witnesses for being here. It's been a very interesting discussion.

The first question is for Mr. Mitchell. Are you here representing Sussex Circle, or are you here with the green ribbon panel, or as an individual?

Mr. James Mitchell: I'm here as an individual, sir.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you.

Mr. Meadowcroft, your comment on carbon capture and storage fascinated me, and I hope I allow enough time for some further comments on that. It's one of the solutions that I think the world is counting on. I think you said you had seven different countries you were looking at, so hopefully I'll allow enough time to discuss that.

We have Bill C-474 before us today. Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Meadowcroft, I'm going to be asking you to provide some input to this committee as to your opinions of this bill.

I think you've received the original bill and then a bill with the changes proposed by the Liberals. I'm going to ask you not to comment on that second one, because in fact we each have amendments we're going to be making, and the proposals from the Liberals at this point are not the relevant pieces of work we're dealing with right now. It may give you an idea of the direction being proposed by one of the parties around this table, but what we're discussing today has been sent from the House, and it is Bill C-474, unamended.

How would you suggest that Bill C-474 be changed? I took a lot of notes as you were speaking. Mr. Mitchell, you said it could be this bill or another, but that the focus needs to require the government to include... I think you agreed with Mr. Meadowcroft that it's an integral part of the process that we look at the economic, social, and environmental components as the government does anything.

The most recent report we had from the commissioner reported on 14 different departments; nine of them were unsatisfactory and five of them are satisfactory now. We have a lot of work to do. As has been pointed out over the last 15 years, governments have not received a good report from the commissioner. Is that because of the structure, or is it the lack of will? What needs to change? How can this bill before us, Bill C-474...?

That's what this committee is tasked with. We're not to send back to the House some window dressing, another bill to make it appear that we care about the environment, but something of substance that will have an effect we all would like to see, so how does it need to change? Do we need to have adequate input?

We have this meeting and one more. That will be a total of four meetings with witnesses, and then we go into clause-by-clause consideration. Are we rushing it, or can we do it in that short period of time and come up with something that will be good and have a positive effect?

● (1640)

Mr. James Mitchell: Shall I start, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, go ahead, Mr. Mitchell.

Mr. James Mitchell: In response to the member's question, I have enormous respect for the author of the bill, so I hope the record will show that, but I can offer the following comments.

First of all, I'm not sure this bill works with the definition of a sustainable development strategy that I would use. It seems to be more like a strategy for addressing significant environmental problems, which to my mind is a different thing from an SDS as I've always understood it. So I think the first thing the committee might want to think about is, are you working with a definition of an SDS that, in your view, is the right one?

The second point is that, as I mentioned, I'm personally not keen on Parliament legislating how the cabinet system works, so I'm not sure you need that. In fact, I would advise against it. I don't see anything wrong with insisting that there should be a national sustainable development strategy; let me be clear on that. So I think the basic intent of the bill is one that I would personally support.

The third point—and I think the chair mentioned this—is that I'm actually not keen on an "independent commissioner". That's a separate issue, but I gather that's off the table, so I won't say anything about that.

Briefly, with respect to what a federal sustainable development strategy should have, I don't think it should be a comprehensive plan for the whole government's activities, as I think Mr. Meadowcroft said. You need to select what it's going to deal with. It has to deal with major objectives and issues of the government, much more like the kinds of things you see in a Speech from the Throne or in the major features of a budget, rather than a plan for running the whole government. It can't include everything. That's the first thing.

Secondly, I think it needs to talk about objectives and how you're going to measure performance against those objectives.

Thirdly, it should create a document that gives useful guidance to individual departments and agencies so that they can hook their activities, or their major activities, into that major strategy.

Then finally, I think it should talk to some extent about standards and goals against which you can measure the performance of the government in fulfilling the objectives of the SDS that you've set out in your bill.

Keep it simple, have the right form of SDS, talk about meaningful goals, and then hold the government to account for meeting those objectives.

● (1645)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Is there time for Mr. Meadowcroft?

The Chair: Mr. Meadowcroft.

Dr. James Meadowcroft: Yes, I actually agree with most of those points. I think the basic intent of the bill is very valuable, because Canada has talked about having a national strategy for a long time, but nothing has been forthcoming.

I think you asked whether the problem is the mechanisms or something else, the political will or whatever. Both have been problems, but I definitely think the mechanism, as it exists so far, is flawed because each department, kind of in isolation, develops its strategy. You need an overarching vision.

If you're talking about an actual strategy, the point about having a handful of key strategic priorities is absolutely critical. If one looks at the international experience of these strategies, the ones that have been pretty useless are ones that have tried to integrate every single thing a government could ever do on the basis that "Oh, we're trying to integrate everything". So you say everything. You say down to—not quite—"reduce the rate of parking offences in the city" or something like that.

What you want is a strategy. That means saying that three, four, or five issues are absolutely strategic if we want to get Canada on track. That means taking the political choices: climate change, water, soil erosion, or whatever they are. I think that's really fundamental. But the absence of that means that some departments do well, as you said, and others don't do well. But there's no overarching country-wide vision.

One other thing I would say is that the question of engagement with other jurisdictions is very important in the Canadian context. That has to be handled in this bill in a way that will build consensus and a cooperation between governments, and not encourage bickering like "somebody's sticking their finger into my jurisdiction" or "keep your finger out, because that's my jurisdiction".

Now, this is just a throwaway comment, but because I lived in Europe for a long time, I watched the gradual evolution of the European Union environmental policy, where the union is taking an increasingly active role. I have to say that in some respects the independent countries of the EU achieve better cooperation on some environmental issues than Canada does with its federal government and its diverse provincial governments. One concrete example is on climate change. With the burden-sharing agreement that the EU worked out way back when at Kyoto, which divided targets so the enthusiastic countries took big targets and countries that didn't care, like Spain, basically got a growth target, that political agreement that will share the burden allowed them to achieve a lot—not perfectly, but a lot. But in Canada—where, for all sorts of historic reasons you all know about, it didn't work out—in fact you couldn't move forward because everybody was in their own corner.

I just think that issue is important in the actual wording of the bill, that it be done in such a way as to draw in the other key actors. On the other hand, you don't want to set it up so that if one actor says, "No, we don't want to join", then nothing can go. So it's delicate.

The Chair: Excellent. Go ahead.

Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thanks very much, all of you. Half the time I want to argue with you, but the other half I want to praise you.

Let me just make one point with Mr. Mitchell and then move on to Mr. Smith.

Mr. Mitchell's point was, if I understand the argument, be careful about using an act of Parliament to establish a machinery of government piece, whether it's a cabinet committee or a central agency, because the challenge is that you're getting into the kitchen, you're limiting flexibility, and you're binding on successors. Is that roughly the caveat?

● (1650)

Mr. James Mitchell: Yes, sir.

Hon. John Godfrey: Then my only problem with that is that we actually have a great example of an act of Parliament that established a central agency that was binding on successors. It's called the Treasury Board. In other words, that was not a decision by the Prime Minister of the day—it may have been in the sense that it was a cabinet decision—but it is binding on all. I think we would agree that things that go on, that make things more accountable, such as Treasury Board or the Auditor General, are useful devices to constrain governments. Acts of Parliament created both those things: Auditor General and Treasury Board.

Mr. James Mitchell: Can I quickly respond, Mr. Godfrey?

That's absolutely right, and in making my comments I was conscious of the FAA amendments that created the Treasury Board, the fact that Treasury Board is a statutory committee. Perhaps I should better say that if you're going to do something that's as fundamental as creating an environmental counterpart to the Treasury Board, or a sustainable development counterpart to the Treasury Board, I would rather that it were a government bill introduced after long deliberation and careful consultation with all parties in the House. If you're talking about the fundamental governance of the nation, I wouldn't like to see something that was simply imposed on a government in a private member's bill. I'm saying that with the greatest respect to private members and to this committee, of course, but we're talking about very fundamental change to the way government business is conducted.

Hon. John Godfrey: So the whole point of the bill, of course, is that it tells the government to do exactly that. It does not dictate in detail, but it does say you have to have this piece of machinery to get on.

My questions for Mr. Smith are the following.

The bill actually is in two parts. Part of it is the national portrait—what does our situation look like?—and the other part is, how are federal government agencies and departments doing? They're interrelated, but they're distinct. I'm interested in Mr. Smith's point of view in the former.

Mr. Smith, in terms of national portraits on subjects that notionally have to do with things that are exclusively or largely in provincial jurisdiction, such as justice, education, and health, does Statistics Canada roll up a national portrait even if they're in the domain of provinces—with the cooperation of provinces, of course?

Mr. Robert Smith: Statistics Canada produces statistics across a whole lot of issues that are important to provinces and important to the federal government. The three you mentioned are relevant, but you could think of all of the economic statistics. You could think of.... Well, it's hard to think of something Statistics Canada does that is of interest only to the federal government. I'm not sure if I could think of anything. So much of the power in the Canadian Confederation is shared that it's hard to find issues that are really only of interest to the federal government.

I don't have much more to say in response to your question other than that.

Hon. John Godfrey: I'm very happy with that answer. You can stop right there.

My final question is this. The bill as written or indeed amended has with it, of course, a schedule that is suggestive of things that a sustainable development plan over the years— long-term, short-term, medium-type—might want to take into account, but by no means is it exhaustive, iterative, whatever you say. Can you see a role for Statistics Canada in supporting the kinds of ambitions in terms of the national portrait? Could Statistics Canada support this bill as written, with its aspirations and the kinds of indicators it's looking at, by leveraging the work you're currently doing in the direction where you hope to go?

Mr. Robert Smith: I don't want to get anywhere close to commenting on the bill itself and whether we could support those particular indicators or any other set of indicators.

Hon. John Godfrey: But that kind of work...?

Mr. Robert Smith: I think I've enumerated the work we're doing on environmental statistics. I hope members of the committee would be familiar with the kind of work we do in economic and social statistics. The final slide of our presentation emphasized the fact that Statistics Canada is ready to help whatever government it may be at a particular time to answer questions about sustainable development with statistics.

So I suppose the simple answer to your question is yes.

● (1655)

Hon. John Godfrey: Thank you. That's fine.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Watson, please.

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

And thank you to the witnesses for appearing. I think we're getting some very good guidance here on what direction we need to take.

I want to draw your attention to the schedule appended to the end of Bill C-474. There are 10 broad goals and dozens of potentially affected areas within each of those. I think you've hinted, Mr. Meadowcroft, and you as well, Mr. Mitchell, that perhaps this may be too many areas to be focusing on in terms of measuring or objectives to achieve. When you're talking about three or four key objectives—we once had five priorities for a plan—do you have any advice on which areas we should be focusing in on or what we should go for?

Dr. James Meadowcroft: I haven't seen the schedule. Unfortunately, it wasn't attached to the version that I got e-mailed. So I don't know exactly what those headings are. When I said that a strategy should pick a certain number of goals, I was talking about the preparation of the strategy as opposed to a bill to consider a strategy. You have to cast the net wide, then make political decisions when it comes time to write a strategy.

Mr. James Mitchell: I would say that the schedule, as it now stands, covers the waterfront. If you were to expect a strategy to address all of this, you would be looking for a plan that was simply too huge and too complicated to be manageable, implementable, developable, measurable.

In the text of the bill, I'm not sure you need a schedule. You could say that you want a strategy that addresses the major sustainable development challenges and objectives of the Government of Canada, something like that. You could give broad direction to what you're looking for, and then see what they come back with. If you don't think the government is really addressing a big issue, say, GHG emissions or water pollution, then you could hammer them. But I wouldn't try to spell that out in detail in the bill.

Dr. James Meadowcroft: I don't think this is an unreasonable list of things to consider in the strategy. I'm glad not to see things like rates of teenage pregnancy and a zillion other economic and social indicators. Sustainable development requires us to integrate economic, social, and environmental decision-making. But in the developed countries, we have to ask, what is the problem? Is the problem that we're not making decisions that promote the economy? No. If you look at the past century, our economy has grown quite well. Over the past 30 years, we have had problems with unemployment and so on, but we haven't done too badly. The same has to be said about the development of welfare institutions and income equality. There's still poverty in Canada. We can do better, but we haven't done too badly.

On the other hand, on the environment we haven't done too well. To some extent, the economic and social gains have been purchased by continuing to degrade the environment. It's not necessary. We can make economic and social gains without mucking up the environment. That's why I think it's reasonable in the sustainable development strategy to start with economic sustainability, precisely because that's the bit we're doing least well.

● (1700)

The Chair: Mr. Lussier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My first question is for Mr. Meadowcroft.

You were probably in Europe when negotiations involving 15 EU countries were taking place on sharing contributions. How do you explain the fact that the provinces of Canada, of which there are only 10, and not 15, are incapable of agreeing? Is it because of the disparities between the extremes we see in Canada—for example, Alberta which produces oil and Quebec which produces hydroelectricity—are more pronounced here than they are between the countries of Europe?

Dr. James Meadowcroft: No, I don't believe that is the explanation, because in actual fact, from an economic and social standpoint, the gap is now much greater between European countries than it is between the provinces of Canada. For example, Norway is now an exporter of oil. It has moved in that direction. On the other hand, Sweden, which is very close by and resembles Norway in many respects, has announced that it wants to have stopped using oil in less than 20 years.

I believe there are a number of reasons why Canada is having difficulty making a commitment in this area. The first is that public opinion is not yet developed enough. Voters do not demand of their politicians that they find a solution, make arrangements and stop quarrelling. The day will come when voters will demand that of their politicians.

I also think that all the constitutional debates in Canada and the mechanisms surrounding that make things difficult. For example, on the energy question, as regards the national energy plan, there are disagreements with Quebec. All of that makes this issue difficult. But I don't think it's impossible to reach agreement. In fact, a solution has to be found. The different levels of government will have to work together and tackle this problem together.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: Thank you.

Mr. Smith, in the text of your presentation, with respect to the quarterly bulletin, you say that you recently did a study on greenhouse gas emissions from the demand prospective. What demand are you referring to?

Mr. Robert Smith: The demand for goods and services produced by Canadian industries.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: So, you're not talking about demand for oil or automobiles.

Mr. Robert Smith: It could be demand for anything—all the goods and services purchased in Canada. Let me give you an example. We studied greenhouse gas emissions associated with total household demand. Through an analytical data base, we are able to say that Canadians spent $2 billion on goods and services, for example, and that greenhouse gas emissions associated with that money amounted to *x* number of megatons.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: Let's come back to my earlier question. We talked about agreements with the Institut de la statistique du Québec. As regards water quality, do you receive raw data from the Institut de la statistique du Québec, as well as data from Environment Canada? How do you combine the two data banks? You say that you have 300 measurement sites. How are the two put together?

Mr. Robert Smith: As I explained to Mr. Bigras, it is basically Environment Canada that takes responsibility for collecting scientific data from provincial governments. We work with Environment Canada, which gives us access to those scientific data. However, we are not the ones collecting the data; we have access to them. We work with Environment Canada and Health Canada to analyze the data and calculate the water quality index. Our role in all of that is to ensure that statistical quality standards apply to the calculation, in order to be able to say, at the end of the process, that everything has been done to ensure good quality estimates.

● (1705)

Mr. Marcel Lussier: Mr. Mitchell, in the Schedule to the Act, there is a list of 10 goals and another list with a lot of items. Are there too many, in your opinion? Have you had time to analyze each of those goals? Are they priorities, as far as you are concerned? And, are the items listed indicators?

Mr. James Mitchell: I don't think a list of 10 factors is excessive. The items or goals listed there are so broad and complex that, if the government were asked to develop a plan for each one of them, we would end up with a Soviet-type five-year plan. It would be completely useless. I prefer to see clearly defined goals that are not as substantive, so that the government can present a policy response in its budget or its Speech from the Throne. There needs to be a plan that sets out some priorities, but not one with such huge requirements.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lussier.

Mr. Harvey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Thank you for being here.

We are all in favour of sustainable development as a means of achieving a balance between the environment, the economy and social effects.

At home, I replaced all my light bulbs with compact fluorescent lights. I am now in the process of replacing all of those fluorescent bulbs, because I have since learned that the mercury they contain is worse than the effect of an incandescent light bulb. In addition, we are not equipped to recycle the fluorescent bulbs.

Sustainable development is not necessarily easy to accomplish, even for someone who sincerely intends to make his or her own contribution.

As regards biofuels, their production has resulted in famine in 35 different countries. We have created a major imbalance.

Mr. Meadowcroft, do you believe that producing biofuels is still consistent with sustainable development?

Dr. James Meadowcroft: I teach energy policy. The title of the course is *Sustainable Energy Policy.* There is no easy answer to that question. It is possible that biofuels have a role in an energy strategy aimed at sustainable development. But, not necessarily. It's complicated.

The same applies to carbon capture and storage. It may be part of a healthy strategy to resolve climate change issues, but not necessarily. Debate and studies in this area are what is needed; it's not a simple problem. Also, the famine issue in many countries is not only attributable to biofuels.

Mr. Luc Harvey: But it is a factor.

Dr. James Meadowcroft: Yes, it is a factor, but there are many others, such as China's very rapid development. People are eating more meat: as a result, more grain is needed to feed the animals. Also, rising oil prices have meant an increase in transportation costs. There are a number of factors at play.

But people had predicted these problems. Ten or fifteen years ago, they said that a growing population, the loss of fertile agricultural land and global development would cause problems.

I guess I'm trying to avoid directly answering your question.

● (1710)

Mr. Luc Harvey: You should get into politics.

[*English*]

The Chair: That sounded like a politician, Mr. Harvey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Harvey: Mr. Mitchell, do you agree with that?

Mr. James Mitchell: I agree with Mr. Meadowcroft when he says that this is too complex a question for one to be able to answer directly.

Mr. Luc Harvey: A country's development is based on energy. And I would like to talk about other forms of energy. I went to the Gaspé Region, where people are up in arms about windmill farms. But nuclear fission will not be available for 20 years.

What kind of energy should our government be moving towards?

Dr. James Meadowcroft: There are several parts to an energy policy. It is important that the energy be cheap and safe. In my opinion, the primary challenge is climate change. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the major challenge over the next 20 years.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Yes, but what about energy?

Dr. James Meadowcroft: It is impossible to say whether it should be nuclear energy or biofuels. A number of different energy sources are needed and they will need to be developed in order to meet the needs of society, but at the same time, greenhouse gas emissions have to be reduced.

There is an important role for biofuels, as long as they are second generation, meaning that they are produced from cellulose, as opposed to food or some other material. That is a whole other subject. However, I do agree that there needs to be more discussion of this.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harvey. Your time is up.

Mr. Regan.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I want to say that I am pleased to see that our English-speaking witnesses are so articulate in French.

I feel like trying to do the same.

Voices: Ah, ah!

Hon. Geoff Regan: No, it's just too painful.

[*English*]

Mr. Chairman, through you, Mr. Meadowcroft talked about the need for fundamental change in the relationship between people and the environment. I don't have the exact words here, but he talked about the fact that we need an industrial transformation to reduce our emissions by 80% to 90%.

Mr. Mitchell, do you agree that this is needed? And if so, we're talking really about a fundamental change. I guess the question is this: without the kind of structure that is suggested by this bill, within cabinet, without the kind of structural change that happened when the Treasury Board was created, for example, how else do we get there? I mean, you say this is a fundamental change; it certainly is, but isn't there a need for fundamental change in relation to how this matter is dealt with?

Mr. James Mitchell: Mr. Chair, Mr. Regan, I agree with Mr. Meadowcroft that there is a need for fundamental change. I don't have his expertise to tell you that it should be an 80% or 90% reduction—I wouldn't venture that before the committee—but I agree that fundamental change is required. I think that's above all, as I said, first and foremost a public and political challenge to get Canadians to realize that those fundamental changes are required. That's where I would start.

Would a bill like this help with that? Well, I think it's pushing on the wrong end of the stick, if I may say, or pushing on string rather than pulling forward. I think job one is for the Government of Canada—whether it's the Conservative government of today, another government tomorrow, or whatever, it doesn't matter—to get Canadians to understand the need for those decisions. How you take the decisions will then actually be relatively easier. I don't think you're going to get the government to the point of accepting that by imposing on them a particular set of mechanisms for that.

● (1715)

Hon. Geoff Regan: But if Canadians are telling parliamentarians that they do want to see change, and if parliamentarians, through Parliament, feel that they want to cause government to do this, what kind of structure can Parliament put in place that will achieve that?

Mr. James Mitchell: Well, again, I'm going to revert to my experience inside the government and say that I don't really think it's useful....

You're a former minister, Mr. Regan—

Hon. Geoff Regan: I haven't forgotten.

Mr. James Mitchell: —so I have no lessons to teach you. But I don't think it's useful for Parliament to tell the government precisely how it needs to take the kinds of decisions that you expect of it in order to—

Hon. Geoff Regan: Let me ask you a different question. If you were advising a Prime Minister on what structure he should put in place in and around his cabinet, what would it be in relation to this issue?

Mr. James Mitchell: That is an excellent question.

I would actually not have a separate committee for sustainable development, because those issues you are talking about in the bill and that we've been talking about today are so fundamental and so integrated that I'd want to see them considered in something like a priorities and planning committee or an executive committee of cabinet, something like that. The most senior, central, general decision-making body of cabinet is where I would put those issues and those decisions.

Hon. Geoff Regan: How does Parliament create greater accountability to Parliament in relation to the work of that kind of body?

Mr. James Mitchell: If I may say so, I don't think you want accountability in relation to the work of that kind of body. You want the government, represented by the PM and his colleagues on the front benches, accounting to you for what they've done, either against the promises they have made or the obligations that are in the law. So you need the right set of obligations in the law and you need to prompt them to make the right sorts of promises; then I would say you would hold them to account for that.

I actually don't think it's useful or productive for Parliament to say, here's how we want you to run your kitchen, and we're going to hold you to account for having run the kitchen in this precise way or that. You want to look at what's coming out of the kitchen. What are you getting by way of policy and program commitments, spending, and fundamental changes?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Isn't it true that Parliament can hold the President of the Treasury Board accountable for decisions of that board? Isn't that a valuable process?

Mr. James Mitchell: Certainly the President of the Treasury Board has responsibilities under the law as the chair of that statutory committee. I'm not sure if I've ever seen that. You normally hold either ministers accountable for the spending that has been made by their departments or the PM accountable for what the government as a whole is doing. It's something like that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Regan.

Go ahead, Mr. Petit.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to all our witnesses.

My question is addressed to Mr. Mitchell. You raised a matter of interest to me. We have a bill before us. I believe you had an opportunity to examine the bill before coming here. I would like to refer you to subclause 5(2). Because I am a lawyer, I am a member of the Justice Committee, but since it is not meeting currently, I am available to deal with the environment. I would like to read you that clause, just to be sure that we all understand each other:

> (2) The Government of Canada therefore adopts the following goals for Canada with respect to sustainable development:

Here I would like to jump to subparagraph (ii), which reads as follows:

> (ii) by making efficient and effective use of energy and resources,

That is a provincial responsibility. Then, in subparagraph (iii), it says:

> (iii) modifying production and consumption patterns to mimic nature's closed loop cycles, thus dramatically reducing waste and pollution,

Part of that is within the purview of the provinces.

In subparagraph (v), it reads:

> (v) exercising good water stewardship [...]

I am referring here to the province of Quebec.

> [...] by protecting and restoring the quantity and quality of fresh water in Canadian ecosystems;

That is a provincial responsibility.

Further on, in subclause (c), it reads:

> (c) Canadian agriculture should provide nutritious and healthy foods, while safeguarding the land, water and biodiversities;

As far as I know, that is a matter that falls within the purview of the provinces. According to the civil law, the province owns the land, the mines and the water.

Then, in subclause (d), it talks about protecting ecosystems and, in the last line, it refers to “parks and wilderness areas;”.

Are we talking about federal parks there, or provincial parks? I live right next to a provincial park. What does this refer to? Do you see what I'm getting at? My question will come later, as a way of guiding you.

Then, in subclause (e), it says:

> (e) Canadian cities should become vibrant, clean [...]

As far as I know, that is a municipal responsibility. Municipal bylaws are not in our area of jurisdiction.

My question for you is a simple one. If we pass a law—you beat me to the punch when you used this term, but I think you correctly read my thoughts—there is a legislative obligation. That means that if I dictate a law on sustainable development, if I start playing around with the water, we will begin to have problems in Quebec. If I start to play around with the forest, I will have problems in Lac Saint-Jean. If I start to play around with the mines, I will have problems in just about every province of the country. So, if I draft a piece of legislation, I am forcing someone to do something. Some provinces will cooperate, but others will dig in their heels because they see it as the government interfering in provincial areas of jurisdiction. The provinces will react very badly to that kind of situation, because they each have their own issues, either because of oil or water. A province does not like the federal government telling it that 194 of its lakes are polluted with blue algae, and then giving it money along with instructions about what to do. We also know that money is transferred to the provinces, but they do what they want with that money afterwards.

So, what should we do with this bill, which seems to be well written, but directly interferes in areas of provincial jurisdiction?

I would draw your attention to the items listed in Column 2 of Schedule 1. It talks about improving environmental efficiency. It talks about water consumption—that is a provincial responsibility. It talks about materials consumption—whatever that is—and energy consumption—once again, this is a provincial responsibility.

These are major issues. We are opening up a can of worms with this. In a way, this almost looks like a Soviet-style plan.

You made an important point earlier. You seem to agree…We all agree that the environment needs to be protected, but we don't want to create a worse problem than the one that already exists. We have ten provinces, three territories, and they all have their specific areas of jurisdiction.

Try and imagine what it was like when the First Nations negotiated the James Bay Agreement. Have you ever seen First Nations people negotiate? Well, I can tell you that's a lot harder than you may think. You will see what they say about it here; they will pay no attention to it. That is why I am interested in hearing your opinion. Ultimately, if we pass this, we have to expect that problems will arise sooner or later.

● (1720)

Mr. James Mitchell: Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am not a lawyer, nor am I a constitutional lawyer. I cannot give you my professional opinion on the constitutionality of those clauses of the bill.

When I read it, I saw it as an expression of the intentions of the federal Parliament, the Parliament of Canada, in a specific area—the environment—which is an area of shared jurisdiction with the provinces. I didn't see any legal obligations for the provinces in there, nor did I see the bill as interfering in areas of jurisdiction that are clearly theirs under the Constitution. As far as I'm concerned, it is more an expression of the will of the federal Parliament in an area of shared jurisdiction with the provinces. However, there are lawyers at the table here; you are probably a lawyer yourself. I, however, am not.

Mr. Daniel Petit: You drew my attention to…

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Petit, your time is up.

Mr. Godfrey, please.

[*Translation*]

Hon. John Godfrey: First of all, just to reassure Mr. Petit, who was not here for the testimony we heard earlier this week, there are really two components to this bill. The first is the national portrait we were discussing with Mr. Smith, that allows us to cooperate with agencies—for example, in Quebec—who are also committed to sustainable development. Then there is the federal component—that is, the implications of the policies set by federal agencies and departments in this area. So, there is a distinction between the responsibilities of federal institutions and the national portrait, where we are cooperating with the provinces.

[*English*]

I'm fascinated by the machinery of government part, obviously, and I can see that what we're struggling for is some kind of analogy.

There are two points.

First of all, Mr. Mitchell says that he would be more comforted if this were not a private member's bill, if it were a government bill. Would it bother him as much if the government decided that this was a useful initiative and lent its support? Would that have less legitimacy if they decided, well, Parliament occasionally does these things, and that it fit with their intentions to provide greater accountability and to respond to a problem with sustainable development plans?

● (1725)

Mr. James Mitchell: As a student of these matters and as an occasional adviser, it would give me more comfort, but if I were asked for my advice by the government on it, I would advise against legislating this sort of mechanism, an internal mechanism like this.

I go back to my view that I wouldn't actually pass a law to create a cabinet committee for this purpose. If I were asked for my view, I would say, take the spirit and intention of this act, make it an obligation on the government, cast in the right way, and let the government go ahead and deliver the results and have members of Parliament judge the results.

Hon. John Godfrey: But if the aims and objectives are as important and serious in the moment in time in which we find ourselves, sharpened by, of course, the whole question of climate change, surely the answer from a machinery of government point of view would be that you'd want something at least as serious as the Treasury Board, wouldn't you? We're facing the challenge of the century here. We might, in other circumstances, have created a kind of war cabinet. So what is it about just turning it back generally to planning and priorities?

I understand what you're saying, but this has a very sharp focus to it. It's a specific lens. It's like winning the war. I would like to revisit one thing we did in the second war, but I suspect that if you look at the British model, they had a war cabinet and they met.

Mr. James Mitchell: May I say, Mr. Godfrey, though, that war cabinet was chaired by the Prime Minister—

Hon. John Godfrey: Exactly.

Mr. James Mitchell: —not another minister. He didn't delegate to another minister the responsibility for the conduct, as you were saying, in an excellent example, of the war. He chaired that committee himself—Churchill did, or Mackenzie King did, let's say.

Hon. John Godfrey: Would that give you a greater degree of comfort, if this committee were chaired by the Prime Minister?

Mr. James Mitchell: But then again I would say, why not leave it to the Prime Minister to take whatever mechanism he or she thinks is best to fulfill this very important obligation? That's my genuine view.

Hon. John Godfrey: We'll, of course, work closely with the government, because this is more than just a partisan issue, to find out what level of comfort they would have with that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godfrey.

Mr. Warawa, you have about two minutes.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Chair, I'm going to hand my time over to Mr. Meadowcroft to talk to us about carbon capture and storage.

The Chair: Mr. Meadowcroft, you have the floor.

Dr. James Meadowcroft: I can talk for several hours on this question without coming up for air. So I wonder if you had a particular thing you were interested in.

Mr. Mark Warawa: In Weyburn, Saskatchewan, we have a project that is now in the commercialization stage. You've mentioned seven other countries, or maybe Canada is one of those seven. Could you give us a very quick overview of what's happening in carbon capture and storage?

Dr. James Meadowcroft: The countries we're looking at are those for whom carbon capture and storage are strategic, so we looked at Norway, the United States, Canada, and Australia. We also looked at the U.K., Germany, and the Netherlands because they're doing a lot, even though they don't have quite as big export fossil fuel industries as Norway, Canada, Australia, and so on. All those countries are pursuing CCS. It's more important for countries that are major fossil fuel exporters, and they're pursuing it with more vigour.

It's interesting to note that in those countries it's part of a development strategy as well as an environmental strategy. In other words, they see that if we're going to grow these industries, we'll need to do something about the greenhouse gas emissions in the medium term.

I'm pleased that Canada is now moving to support more activity in this area, because some of my European colleagues have been chuckling over the last couple of years and saying, "You guys think you're ahead, ha, ha, ha, but we're going to beat you. You'll be buying your technology from us." I hope that isn't the case. One of the things we're looking at in this project that's really interesting is how CCS is integrated into climate change strategies, because we are moving toward other forms of fuel—renewables, solar, wind, and things like that. The question is, what role can each play? How do you develop CCS in a balanced way, instead of just kind of throwing everything at CCS? That's a political question.

I'll stop there.

● (1730)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Maybe we can have you back again to talk about solutions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Warawa.

The suggestion has been made that we have some members from Environment Canada here to talk about the operational aspects—not policy, of course; it's not their job to comment on policy. So we will make that request, and of course we may have a slight problem on Monday due to flooding. But this will give you the information and they can comment on that.

I want to thank our witnesses very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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