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Chair

Mr. James Bezan

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● (1540)

[*English*]

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

First I want to apologize that we are running behind schedule. We just had votes in the House. Members will continue to drift in, but we have quorum and we'll get moving.

We have before us today, pursuant to Standing Order 32(5), the fall 2010 report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, which was referred to this committee yesterday.

Joining us from the Office of the Auditor General is the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Scott Vaughan.

Welcome, Scott.

With him is the principal for sustainable development strategies, audits and studies, Jim McKenzie.

Joining us from the Department of the Environment we have Michael Keenan, assistant deputy minister, strategic policy branch; Jim Abraham, director general, weather and environmental monitoring; and Dan Wicklum, director general, water science and technology.

From the DFO we have Jody Thomas, deputy commissioner, operations, Canadian Coast Guard.

From the Department of Health there is Paul Glover, assistant deputy minister, healthy environments and consumer safety branch.

From the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development we have Sheila Gariepy, director, environment and renewable resources directorate, northern affairs.

From the Department of Natural Resources we have David Boerner, the acting assistant deputy minister, earth sciences sector.

From the Department of Transport we have Gerard McDonald, assistant deputy minister, safety and security.

Not all departments are sitting at the table, but they are here to take questions if members have questions of their specific departments based on the commissioner's report.

We have four presentations before we take questions from members of the committee.

Commissioner Vaughan, please kick us off, and keep your opening comments to less than 10 minutes.

Thank you.

Mr. Scott Vaughan (Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): Mr. Chair, good afternoon, and thank you for inviting us.

I'm pleased to present to the committee our 2010 fall report that was tabled in the House of Commons yesterday. I'm accompanied by senior colleagues Jim McKenzie, Andrew Ferguson, and Richard Arseneault.

[*Translation*]

Our report examines a number of areas, ranging from oil spills from ships to fresh water monitoring and climate change impacts.

It points to some common and long-standing weaknesses in the way the government has been managing environmental issues, from a lack of critical data to inadequate information about key environmental threats, to a lack of plans to tackle those threats.

[*English*]

Over the years the government has made repeated commitments to take the lead in protecting the environment and moving toward sustainable development. Sustained leadership is necessary to successfully address the weaknesses we have reported time and time again.

The first chapter in the report examines the government's readiness to respond to oil spills from ships. Every day, on average, at least one oil spill is reported to the Canadian Coast Guard and it responds. Fortunately, most spills are small. However, given the findings of this audit, I am troubled that the government is not ready to respond to a major oil spill.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

We found that the Canadian Coast Guard's national emergency management plan is out-of-date, and the organization has not fully assessed its response capacity in over a decade.

Although Transport Canada assesses private sector response organizations to verify their readiness to respond to spills, a similar process is not in place for the Coast Guard.

We also found that because the Coast Guard does not have a reliable system to track spills, it cannot accurately determine the number of spills that occur each year, their size and their environmental impacts.

[*English*]

We note several areas of concern, from incomplete risk assessments to out-of-date emergency plans. These must be addressed to ensure that the federal government is ready to respond to any ship-source oil spill occurring in Canadian waters.

In chapter 2 we examine how Environment Canada is tracking the quality and quantity of Canada's freshwater resources through its long-term, fresh water monitoring programs. Environment Canada has been running the federal government's water monitoring programs for 40 years, yet it has not taken such basic steps as defining its responsibilities and responding to the threats to Canada's water resources that it itself has identified.

Environment Canada is not monitoring water quality on most federal lands, and it does not know what monitoring, if any, is being done by other federal departments on those lands.

[*Translation*]

The department has assessed the changing risks that threaten Canada's freshwater resources, but it has not adjusted its monitoring networks to respond to industrial development, climate change and population growth in certain regions.

Environment Canada should update its assessment of the threats facing Canada's water resources, from climate change to impacts on human health, so that it can manage its network to understand and respond to the greatest threats.

In chapter 3, we focus on the federal role in adapting to the impacts of climate change. The government has stated that climate change impacts are inevitable, and are already happening. The health of Canadians and Canada's natural environment, communities, and economy are vulnerable to the impacts of a changing climate, and the government is not ready to respond to them.

[*English*]

The lack of a federal strategy and action plan has hindered departments' efforts at coordinating actions to address the effects of climate change. The departments we selected for analysis have identified the risk they may face because of climate change, but they have taken little concrete action to adapt to the potential impacts. Adapting to climate change requires sustained leadership that includes a federal strategy and plan comprising concrete actions both to inform Canadians of climate impacts and to help them adapt to our changing climate.

Mr. Chair, the final chapter of our annual report is on environmental petitions. The petitions process was created in 1995 to provide Canadians with a simple yet formal way to raise concerns and get answers directly from federal ministers on questions about environmental issues.

[*Translation*]

We received 18 petitions this year.

Health impacts of environmental issues were once again the topic most often raised, followed by toxic substances, fisheries, and water.

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, I've terminated my opening statement and would be pleased to answer questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner Vaughan.

Mr. McDonald, you can bring your opening comments.

Mr. Gerard McDonald (Assistant Deputy Minister, Safety and Security, Department of Transport): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Gerard McDonald, and I'm the assistant deputy minister of safety and security at Transport Canada. I'm thankful for the opportunity to be here today to discuss ongoing improvements to environmental programs and policies that fall under my purview.

My discussion today surrounds chapter 1 of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development's report, "Oil Spills from Ships". I would like to extend my gratitude to the commissioner and his staff, because the report is an integral part of our plan to continuously improve and deliver on our objectives.

With me today are my colleagues from Environment Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard. I would like to speak to you about the government-industry partnership known as Canada's marine oil spill preparedness and response regime and its initial response to oil pollution from ships.

Established in 1995, the regime sets out guidelines and a regulatory structure in order to prepare and respond to marine oil spills, and it is based on the "polluter pays" principle.

● (1550)

[*Translation*]

Transport Canada is the lead regulatory agency, and is responsible for the governance, the overall management, and oversight of the regime.

We play a vital role in monitoring marine activity levels, conduct risks assessments, and make adjustments to the regime as required.

Transport Canada develops and enforces standards to better protect our environment, and through regulations, ensures that the appropriate level of preparedness is available to respond to marine oil pollution incidents in Canada within prescribed time standards and operating environments.

In addition to bringing regulations into effect, Transport Canada strictly enforces pollution prevention regulations through the inspection of ships for compliance with pollution prevention provisions, and through the investigation of pollution incidents.

[*English*]

Transport Canada can also lay charges against anyone who does not comply with the regulations and can issue administrative monetary penalties for being non-compliant with the legislation. Administrative monetary penalties provide a way outside the courts to enforce our laws. They make the Transport Canada enforcement program more effective and in turn can help improve the safety of the marine community, the marine environment, and ultimately the general public.

The partnerships we have in place are instrumental in accelerating the development of mutually beneficial programs, policies, and goals. Canada's national marine oil spill preparedness and response regime is an excellent example of such a partnership. Industry plays a major role in the success of the regime because they have an obligation to ensure an effective level of preparedness and response to an oil spill through compliance with regulatory requirements and successful collaboration with the government. Response to oil spills in Canada is always a combined effort between industry and federal, provincial, and municipal governments and regulators, as well as response organizations.

[*Translation*]

However, polluters are ultimately responsible for the spills they cause, and remain responsible for the containment and cleanup of a marine oil spill. That is why the Regime is based on the polluter-pay principle.

As one of the partners working with the regime, the Canadian Coast Guard also plays a vital role and will monitor clean-up activities of the polluter, or take over clean-up efforts in situations when the polluter is unknown, unwilling, or unable to respond.

Prevention of oil spills is a priority for the Government of Canada, and the regime has proven to be an extremely effective system that tributes to preventative measures, and ensures an effective response when an oil spill from ships occur.

[*English*]

I want to be very clear when I say that the Government of Canada is well prepared and ready to respond to ship-source oil spills in Canadian waters. We have been doing so for many years, and we will continue to effectively respond to ship-source oil spill emergencies. The regime is a system that ensures cleaner water and enables a timely reaction in the event of an oil spill incident or accident.

I am proud to say that Transport Canada and our partners from both government and industry are committed to continue building on Canada's national marine oil spill preparedness and response regime. We are always working with our partners to improve how this regime functions and, if possible, to provide a more efficient response to oil spills from ships in Canadian waters.

On the recommendation that Transport Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard conduct a national risk assessment related to ship-source oil spills, Transport Canada has pledged to work with our partners to build on risk assessments for all three coasts. Scoping of this risk assessment will begin this year and it will be completed by the end of fiscal year 2011-12.

[*Translation*]

To speak to the second recommendation, Transport Canada recognizes the need for up-to-date emergency management plans, and has committed to review and update our plans annually.

Transport Canada has recently reviewed our Environmental Prevention and Response National Preparedness Plan. Regarding the recommendation to facilitate a hazardous and noxious substance regime in Canada, we will work with our key partners on this front on developing necessary systems and procedures.

● (1555)

[*English*]

This will complement the work that is already under way to develop a national HNS incident preparedness and response regime. Transport Canada assures Canadians that we are taking action to deliver on our environmental priorities. In light of the recommendations made, we are committed to build on our national marine oil spill preparedness and response regime, as well as risk assessments for preparedness and response efforts to oil spills from ships.

Globalization has opened many markets and increased shipping and trade on a world scale. In turn, this has complicated marine transportation, as factors such as varying activity volumes, vessel types, and increase in the transportation of various hazardous substances are inevitably involved. However, as it stands today, should an HNS incident occur in our waters, the Government of Canada is prepared and ready to respond to ship-source oil pollution. The Canadian Coast Guard, through its national response team, would fulfill a coordination role to monitor the incident and manage cleanup activities. Environment Canada and the industry may also be called upon to contribute to the response efforts.

The complexity of global shipping means there is greater potential for an HNS incident to occur in our waters, which is why there is also a need to work toward the creation of a global framework that can help combat HNS emergencies. Most importantly, a successful global framework will serve as a guiding principle. It will enable Canada to develop an HNS regime to better protect our waters, and in turn it will allow Canada to support conventions and protocols that have been established internationally.

In order to be successful, any regime that Canada develops must be consistent with international conventions and protocols, including the OPRC-HNS protocol, in other words, the protocol on preparedness, response, and cooperation to pollution incidents by hazardous and noxious substances. This will require a great deal of cooperation and coordination at the national and international levels, which will continue to take time to complete.

That being said, work is indeed under way, and some milestones have already been met to move Canada toward an HNS regime.

[*Translation*]

We examined the chemical regimes of other countries to better understand the complexity of development and application, and we will continue to study what type of chemicals are transported to and from Canada, to help us better define the scope of a successful national framework.

We have invested valuable time to research and analyze related reports and previous initiatives regarding the development of a marine chemical . emergency response regime.

As well, materials to facilitate national consultations have been developed to provide an overview of an HNS regime to stakeholders, and to present the benefits of such a regime.

[*English*]

We are working within Transport Canada and with our government partners on both the accession of the OPRC-HNS protocol and the ratification of the HNS convention on liability and compensation. We have received and are still expecting multiple reports on the trade and traffic of HNS from the marine transportation sector in Canada.

Lastly, we have partnered with the Centre of Documentation, Research and Experimentation on Accidental Water Pollution to create an HNS educational guide for the general public. The milestones we have been able to achieve add to the fundamental objective of creating a global HNS regime that will help mitigate the environmental impacts of HNS incidents on our water and ensure the protection and safety of the public.

In closing, I look forward to seeing the long-term benefits of having effective regimes in Canada, a national oil spill preparedness and response regime that aims to continuously improve the safety of our marine communities, and better protection of our environment, as well as a global HNS regime that would lead to the development of a national framework in Canada.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak today. I look forward to responding to your questions.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McDonald.

Ms. Thomas, you have the floor.

Ms. Jody Thomas (Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Good afternoon. My name is Jody Thomas, and I'm the deputy commissioner of operations with the Canadian Coast Guard.

Thank you for the invitation to appear today to discuss the first chapter of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development's annual report entitled “Oil Spills from Ships”.

I would like to start by thanking the commissioner and his dedicated staff for the recommendations directed at the coast guard in the chapter on oil spills from ships. I would equally like to clarify that the main objective of the audit was to assess the management framework of the coast guard's environmental response program.

The commissioner did not audit the operational delivery of the program or actual environmental response activities related to incidents on the water.

As my colleague from Transport Canada has just explained, Canada's marine oil spill preparedness response regime outlines the framework for industry to be responsible to clean up their own oil spills. Transport Canada is responsible for the regulatory aspects of the regime, while the Canadian Coast Guard is the lead federal agency responsible to ensure an appropriate response to ship-source spills.

In normal situations where a shipowner is responding to a spill, the coast guard will monitor the activities of the shipowner to ensure that actions are taken to the satisfaction of the Government of Canada. However, if a shipowner is either unwilling or unable to respond, or if he is unknown, the coast guard will take action to ensure there is an appropriate response, either using our own equipment or through a private company such as a response organization.

The Canadian Coast Guard responds to an average of 1,300 pollution incidents per year and works with federal, provincial, and industry partners to ensure an appropriate response to all incidents. To date, the Canadian Coast Guard has responded to every pollution event of which it has been notified.

This summer, in addition to responding to the grounding of two vessels in the Arctic, the coast guard responded to 86 reported marine pollution events nationally between August 28 and September 15.

Canadians can be assured that if faced with a major spill, the Canadian Coast Guard will provide all available resources and cooperate with its federal, provincial, industry, and international partners to help minimize the impacts to the marine environment.

[*Translation*]

Overall, the Canadian Coast Guard agrees with the commissioner’s recommendations for improvements to its administrative processes related to the environmental response program.

Work is underway to make improvements in the areas of risk assessment, updating emergency management plans, and establishing national procedures for documenting results of spill responses.

[*English*]

To effect this work, within coast guard we have created a new environmental response branch under the leadership of a dedicated director. As well, the coast guard and Transport Canada have begun, as you've heard, a scoping exercise to update previous risk assessments.

Further, while the audit notes that several coast guard governance documents are not up to date, as part of our day-to-day business we have made management decisions to ensure response equipment is strategically positioned in locations based on our current and evolving understanding of risk. Risk is not static, and neither is our approach. For example, in Placentia Bay, the coast guard has placed caches of first response equipment commensurate with an increase in vessel tanker traffic.

The coast guard will have a national environmental response strategy in place by spring 2011. This strategy will be supplemented by the development of a national response policy and plans for directing Canadian Coast Guard efforts, including those related to a major incident, and will establish a periodic review process to ensure that its national and regional emergency management plans remain accurate and relevant. This review process will be in place by spring of 2012.

[*Translation*]

The Coast Guard will continue to improve our management processes and we will continue to ensure that the quality environmental protection measures the Canadian public has come to expect from this national institution continue to be strengthened

[*English*]

Thank you very much. I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Thomas.

Mr. Keenan, you can begin your opening remarks.

Mr. Michael Keenan (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of the Environment): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to speak to the standing committee about the report tabled in Parliament yesterday by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

[*Translation*]

I would also thank the commissioner for his report. I welcome his input because it is important to effectively implement the federal government's environmental policies and programs.

I am going to briefly outline action by Environment Canada that is either already underway or planned to address the issues that the commissioner raised in the second and third chapters.

● (1605)

[*English*]

With respect to chapter 2, entitled “Monitoring Water Resources”, Environment Canada has implemented a strong, comprehensive approach to protect Canada's waters and has taken concrete and measurable actions to implement that approach. The department's plan includes investments in monitoring, water science, research and technology, cleanup of problem areas, as well as building key partnerships. For example, through the action plan for clean water, Environment Canada supports investments to clean up and restore Lake Winnipeg, Lake Simcoe, and several areas of concern in the Great Lakes. The department also continues to work with the Quebec government to protect the St. Lawrence. Environment Canada, along with its partners, is also developing wastewater system effluent regulations to phase out the dumping of untreated and undertreated sewage into Canadian waterways.

The department has reviewed the commissioner's recommendations and officials have already begun taking steps to address the issues raised.

First, Environment Canada will update the inventory of federal lands and waters of federal interest. Second, the department will review and improve criteria used to assess water monitoring needs and on an ongoing basis will continue to share information with federal stakeholders. Third, Environment Canada will work with other federal departments, including the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, to clarify and document roles and responsibilities for long-term water quality and quantity monitoring. In addition, the department plans to use the 2008 World Meteorological Organization guidelines, as well as other benchmarks as appropriate, for water monitoring networks.

Environment Canada will continue to improve reporting of the status of water quality through the Canadian environmental sustainability indicators program and by using the water quality index set out by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment.

Finally, the department will maintain its national ISO certification and continue to apply the performance measurement principles of “plan, do, check, and improve” to water quantity monitoring. We will continue to incorporate best regional practices into departmental water quality monitoring activities across the country.

With respect to chapter 3, “Adapting to Climate Impacts”, Environment Canada agrees with all the recommendations and is working toward addressing them.

To provide context, in 2007 the government announced an investment of $85.9 million in adaptation programming. Investments went toward research to improve climate change scenarios in Canada and developing pilot alert and response systems to protect the health of Canadians from infectious disease, to name a few. For example, throughout this programming, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is funding initiatives to assist northerners in assessing key vulnerabilities and opportunities for adaptation. Natural Resources Canada is also developing and disseminating management tools in supporting regional adaptation programs.

Internationally, Canada is investing $45 million this fiscal year for adaptation programming as part of the $400 million in fast-start financing under the Copenhagen Accord to help developing countries reduce their emissions and adapt to climate change.

Departmental officials have outlined a strategy in response to the commissioner's recommendations and have begun to take steps to address the issues raised.

[*Translation*]

While individual departments continue to develop adaptation tools and best practices according to their primary areas of expertise, Environment Canada will establish an interdepartmental committee to share these tools and best practices across the federal government. Environment Canada has also taken steps to identify the adaptation measures necessary to prepare the department for risks that climate change presents for its areas of responsibility. Lastly, Environment Canada will build on previous and ongoing interdepartmental work to develop a federal adaptation policy framework.

[*English*]

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, departments are building on their activities in relation to the environment through credible science, successful partnerships, and a commitment to high-quality service delivery to Canadians.

My colleagues and I would be pleased to answer questions at the committee's pleasure.

Thank you.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Keenan.

I want to thank all of you for your opening comments and staying under the time limit.

We've opened it up to questions. I would just remind witnesses that members only have a set schedule in which to ask questions. The first round is seven minutes; the second round is five minutes. So I ask that all witnesses keep your responses very succinct and to the point.

Mr. Scarpaleggia.

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

I'd like to ask the commissioner about the fact that there is one federal water monitoring station in the Athabasca River. Am I understanding correctly?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: One of the exhibits we have in chapter 2, Mr. Chair, is in the northern Athabasca River. So the context is that in 2001 Environment Canada identified as a threat to human health toxic pollutants from the oil sands projects area. Within the northern Athabasca region, Fort McMurray and northwards, there is one federal water quality monitoring station. It's located 150 kilometres north of the oil sands projects. It was established in the late 1970s. It was established to measure effluents from the pulp and paper sector.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: So it doesn't deal with the oil sands industry, then.

Mr. Scott Vaughan: That's correct. Although I stand to be corrected, what we've said in the chapter is that the station that is there is established to measure effluents from pulp and paper.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I see.

We've been trying to focus the government on water quality issues related to the oil sands for quite a while now, and under duress, the government finally named a panel to look at this, but I don't know when it will report publicly. The response we've had from the government for the last two or three years is, “Look, it's not our problem. We have an agreement with the province. We've devolved this to the province, and it so happens that the province has devolved it to private sector laboratories and to industry.” And so on and so forth.

So is this really an important issue that there's only one federal water quality monitoring station in the Athabasca, and its mission isn't to measure pollution from the oil sands, one of the biggest industries in the world, it's to measure pollution from the pulp and paper industry, which has cleaned up its act since regulations were adopted about 15 years ago? Is this issue a true federal issue, or is it just a red herring?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: What we would say in the chapter, and you've alluded to it, is that this is a shared jurisdiction. The provinces have a very strong role in water monitoring. We're not able to look at the capacity of provinces on water monitoring, either quality or quantity, so what we've said is this. Within the scope of our responsibilities, what is the federal presence in water monitoring in that area?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Are you suggesting there's really no role for the federal government in monitoring the Athabasca for oil sands pollution? If you are, then I don't know why, respectfully, Commissioner, you raise the issue of there being only one station.

Mr. Scott Vaughan: I think it's a broader issue. What we've said is that it would be important for Environment Canada that they have identified some risks. That was one area, one priority, where they have said there is risk to human health from those pollutants. They have responsibility under CEPA, for example—direct responsibility under CEPA—for managing those pollutants; therefore, we've said, based on their own risk assessment, the facts today are that there is one station.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: There should be more, obviously.

Do you think the fact that the federal government doesn't know which of its departments is monitoring water quality on federal lands is a result of the fact that there's no federal water strategy in this country? I mean, if there were a federal water strategy, things would coalesce, people would start to really focus on the issue, and we might have more information within the federal government itself about what's going on with water on federal lands.

Mr. Scott Vaughan: One of the things we did say was that 40 years does seem to be enough time to clarify who is responsible for what. And we've said that to date there are basic questions in terms of federal responsibility in this area.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: On first nations water quality, there are 12 monitoring stations in 3,000 first nations. I've been told—and I'm not an expert—that the quality of drinking water on first nations is a function of the quality of the water source. Does that mean we're really not too concerned if we have only 12 stations out of 3,000? Does that mean the federal government isn't really too concerned about the quality of the water source? And is that perhaps one of the reasons we have so much trouble in this country delivering clean water to first nations?

● (1615)

Mr. Scott Vaughan: We had an audit presented to the House of Commons in 2005. It identified significant, serious problems with the quality of drinking water on first nations reserves. The Auditor General will present an audit this spring that will revisit and update that issue.

But it is important to the extent that we looked at the long-term water quality monitoring. There's often a long route for water between lakes or rivers and the tap. There's filtration. There are different ways in which water is treated, in many areas, before it is consumed directly at the tap.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: What I have been told by experts is that the kind of filtration system you build is often engineered as a function of the quality of the source water. So if you don't know the quality of the source water, then you're not going to build the right system, and that's why we have brand new drinking water filtration plants on first nations reserves and they aren't functioning. They're idle because they just don't work, because, obviously, we haven't done our homework.

In terms of the possibility of oil spills and so on, has Transport Canada looked at the issue around certification of ship pilots on the Great Lakes? I know there's a system along the St. Lawrence such that if a ship comes in, you have to put an experienced pilot on the ship as it goes through the St. Lawrence, but once you get to the Great Lakes, you don't have to do that, nor do the private ship pilots have to be certified. Are you looking at that issue? I think the transport department has been dragging its feet on that issue for a quite a while. As a matter of fact, I think you were criticized by the Auditor General in one of her reports on that specific issue, on that specific inaction.

Mr. Gerard McDonald: Thank you for that question.

We have been looking quite extensively into the issue of certification of pilots on the Great Lakes.

I should clarify that presently all international ships that enter the Great Lakes do require that a pilot be on board. It was only the question of domestic ships and their need to carry a pilot. Right now, the way the regulation is written, certain domestic ships, if their masters are seen to have taken a prescribed number of trips on the Great Lakes over the past three years, are allowed to do their own pilotage.

We were, as you correctly state, criticized by the Auditor General for this—as was the Great Lakes Pilotage Authority, I should add. We've been working very closely with the Great Lakes Pilotage Authority, the ship owners, and the pilots to come to an acceptable regime to allow for the certification of domestic masters on Canadian ships on the Great Lakes. And we would hope to be able to prepublish a regulation early in the new year in that regard.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Time has expired.

Monsieur Ouellet, *vous avez la parole*.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you, Mr. Vaughan, and thank you, everyone. Your reports are truly well written and instructive, and very valuable. I congratulate you.

Mr. Vaughan, last year, you told us, on the subject of climate change, that the government had no plan, no strategy. You repeat that this year. Has there been no change since last year? Are you reporting the same observation as last year?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Thank you for the question. Last year, we submitted a report to Parliament on the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act. We said the government had an annual plan. However, we said there were gaps in that plan, and the Act requires that the government present a plan each year. So we have an obligation to do that.

This time, the situation is different, we are talking about climate change in terms of adaptation to the impacts. We said there was no federal strategy, no federal plan. In addition, Mr. Keenan said that in 2007, the government was supposed to prepare a federal strategy to deal with the impacts of climate change, but as of today we still have no plan.

● (1620)

Mr. Christian Ouellet: I think that a plan and a strategy are not exactly the same thing. We start with strategies, we establish them, and then we make a plan, based on our strategies.

So you are reiterating that at present, the government has no strategy or plan for dealing with climate change.

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Exactly.

I think we used both terms in the document, "strategy" and "plan".

Mr. Christian Ouellet: I would like to move on to another subject, Mr. Vaughan. That is spills in waterways. Could you tell me whether you have taken into account the spill that occurred in 1970, the *Irving Whale* black tide disaster on the Îles-de-la-Madeleine? You know that between 150,000 and 200,000 plastic bags were filled with sand contaminated with oil and PCBs, highly toxic materials, and they are still there.

I didn't see that anywhere, unless I missed it. In your report, did you consider the fact that the Coast Guard does not seem to be able to satisfy either coastal residents or the experts? They say there is an imminent danger that the bags filled with oil- and PCB-saturated sand will burst one day—apparently, some do burst from time to time—and this would be a major danger both to coastal residents and to the flora, the biodiversity of the St. Lawrence.

Could you tell me whether you considered that example in your report? If so, would you have any recommendations to make about that? Is this a relevant situation? I have heard there were other ships elsewhere that were also in this condition.

Have you assessed the silence maintained by the Coast Guard, which keeps its doors shut and doesn't want to say what it wants to do about this? Have you had access to its information?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Thank you for your question.

Obviously, that question is very important and I have noted the details. So we can continue to communicate with you after this meeting.

The period for which we did an audit is 2007 to 2009. So you might have to get information from Environment Canada. If there are long-term problems associated with pollutants that affect the quality of the environment—

Mr. Christian Ouellet: That is why I'm talking to you about it today.

In fact, from 2007 to 2009 a lot of things happened in this case. This is 2010 and it seems to me that nothing is being done. In 2009 it was decided that nothing would be done to recover the bags and we would continue to wait for the bags to deteriorate by themselves. The experts say that at this rate, there is a risk we will still have bags of PCBs on the dunes on the islands a century from now.

It seems that you haven't studied that. So I wouldn't want to bother you with it.

I would like to move on to another subject. You have studied water quality. I'll give you an example of the problem between Transport Canada and the Environment Department. I'll take the example of a lake in my riding, but there are others. Let's take Lac Bowker, where they are trying to ban motorboats, this being under Transport Canada's jurisdiction, that pollute the water source for several municipalities that get their water from that lake. They damage the banks, the biodiversity around the lake. The people at Transport Canada have said it isn't their concern and Environment Canada is doing nothing.

You're telling me that you have done research into what Environment Canada is doing to protect our drinking water sources.

● (1625)

Mr. Scott Vaughan: You could put the question to Transport Canada and Environment Canada directly. In general, when a lot of departments are involved in an issue, sometimes there are coordination problems. That's a reality.

Mr. Christian Ouellet: You don't look at what the other departments are doing? And yet I see in some places that you talked to other departments.

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Yes. In chapter 2 of the report, we evaluated Environment Canada's role because responsibilities have changed when it comes to the two freshwater quality and quantity monitoring programs in Canada.

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

[*English*]

Does anyone from Environment Canada want to address the issue that Monsieur Ouellet raised?

Mr. Michael Keenan: The one point I would add, in addition to the comments by the commissioner, is that the member has pointed out a concern over water quality. I don't personally know this lake, but I assume it's completely within the boundaries of the province of Quebec. As such, a lot of the jurisdiction for that would be with the provincial government.

Environment Canada works closely with its counterparts in the Government of Quebec, and we share information and plans. For example, in the Parc marin du Saguenay-Saint-Laurent, where there's a shared jurisdiction, we work very closely together. But I believe that a lot of the jurisdiction for dealing with this would be at the provincial level as opposed to the federal level.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Keenan.

Mr. Cullen, you have the floor.

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

Thank you to all our witnesses today.

Looking at chapter 1, “Oil spills from Ships”, the entities, the governments, agreed with all four recommendations that the commissioner outlined.

Is that true?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So the various government agencies agreed on the conclusions of the commissioner.

In the event of an oil spill from a tanker, what is the lead agency from the federal government?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: Are you talking about the response, the cleanup?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes.

Mr. Gerard McDonald: That would be the coast guard.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay.

The coast guard, the face of the federal government's response, gets the public praise or the public blame, depending on how things go.

The commissioner pointed out in his report that no procedures are in place to verify the Canadian Coast Guard's readiness, and the coast guard agrees with that finding.

Ms. Jody Thomas: The coast guard agrees that we haven't developed a system to systematically assess our capacity. But we say that this is a partnership, and our assessment will be evaluated as part of the risk assessment in the overall administration of the program.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This isn't news.

Commissioner Vaughan, was it 20 years ago that the federal government said we needed a national oil response strategy?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Exactly—after the Brander-Smith report.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So 20 years later we don't have one. I know that things get busy, but we've expanded the amount of shipping and tankers across the country, and there's a prospect for more on all three coasts, one would argue.

This has caused you some concern as the commissioner. Is that correct?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: We said we had identified a number of management issues with the coast guard, like out-of-date emergency plans and out-of-date risk assessments. We highlighted them in the report.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You also said you don't necessarily know whether all the equipment is available or in working order. Is that correct?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: That's correct, sir.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Ms. Thomas, how many kilometres of booms do we have on the east and west coasts that are presently concerned with oil spills?

Ms. Jody Thomas: It's not kilometres of boom; it's metres of boom. I have some stats here for you.

We have approximately 88,000 metres of boom in the five coast guard regions, and 3,000 metres of offshore boom was provided to the U.S. department to respond to the *Deepwater Horizon*. We're getting it back in March.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So you have about 8.8 kilometres of it, if I'm doing some good math here.

In the spill in the gulf, do you know how many kilometres of boom were put out?

● (1630)

Ms. Jody Thomas: In total there were hundreds of thousands of metres.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Hundreds of thousands of metres? We have 88,000.

Ms. Jody Thomas: Right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We're drilling off the coast of Newfoundland right now a deeper well—

Ms. Jody Thomas: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —than the one that erupted in the south.

What I'm concerned about here is that the commissioner comes out and says we don't have a plan, that we don't know where the equipment is or if it all works, that the training isn't consistent across the country, that there isn't national training, and that after 20 years we still don't have a national regime.

You mentioned the partnerships, Mr. McDonald. The companies, when shipping the oil, have to have an emergency response plan. Correct?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is that made public?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: I believe so. I'd have to verify that, but I believe it is.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I think it would be important to know that, for public assurance.

Mr. Vaughan, do you know?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: No, we don't know.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I have a question about water quality for Mr. Keenan.

The comment was made earlier that there's one water quality station 150 kilometres down the Athabasca River. Is that correct?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I'm going to refer that question to my colleague, the director general of water.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's an impressive title, director general of water. Restless nights, I'm sure.

Mr. Dan Wicklum (Director General, Water Science and Technology, Department of the Environment): Unfortunately, my salary's not nearly as impressive.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We'll try to do something about that in our recommendations.

Mr. Dan Wicklum: There is one long-term water monitoring station, but it's a very incomplete picture.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It was suggested that this water quality station was initially set up to monitor the effluent released from pulp and paper. That's correct?

Mr. Dan Wicklum: That's right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Does the station currently monitor the toxins released from the oil sands operations? Does it look for those?

Mr. Dan Wicklum: Yes, it does. It monitors for something called polyaromatic hydrocarbons, which is one of the key potential pollutants.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm confused, Mr. Vaughn. In your report you talked about that one station, 150 kilometres away—and I have some concern with the distance.

Does the federal government have the capacity to understand if things are leaching into the Athabasca River as a result of industrial activity?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Yes. The question is whether or not that one station is able to address all the toxics that Environment Canada identified in their 2001 risk assessment on oil sands pollutants that could pose a human health threat.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm hearing contradictory things. I want to get this clarified.

Mr. Dan Wicklum: I'd be happy to clarify. Monitoring in the Athabasca River is very much a shared responsibility among a number of different entities. There are four major monitoring entities: the Government of Canada, the Province of Alberta, the industry, and a multi-stakeholder group called RAMP.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, I know about them.

Mr. Dan Wicklum: The Province of Alberta has 10 monitoring stations, long term. They started in the seventies. They monitor a broad suite of parameters.

RAMP is funded by industry, again a multi-stakeholder group. They have over 40 sites. They monitor even more comprehensively. They include polyaromatic hydrocarbons, metals, metal mixtures, methanic acids, essentially the full suite of things that we'd be concerned about in the river.

Industry, as part of the permitting for each of the permits they get from the province, often has monitoring requirements as well.

The river is actually heavily monitored.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you.

I have a question about the adaptation chapter. It says that the government agrees with the recommendations found in this chapter.

Is that correct, Mr. Vaughn?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: To quote from the chapter, “Overall, the departments we examined have not taken concrete actions to adapt to the impacts of a changing climate”. That's to say, the federal government still lacks an overarching federal strategy that identifies clear and concrete action with respect to adapting to climate change.

When you were asked in an interview, what does this affect, I believe your response was “Everything.”

In respect of the effects of climate change on the Canadian economy and the health of Canadians, there were two reports you noted in your research. They were given either no release or very stunted release. All the same, the government put an extensive amount of work into them. I don't know if there's an estimate of how much this cost. Mr. Glover, if he's in the room, might be able to answer. But the reports were a labour of many years, and hundreds and hundreds of people were involved. Yet we didn't see a release that would match the effort the government had made. One was by Natural Resources and dealt with understanding the impacts on our natural resource economy. The other, by Health Canada, was about understanding the impacts of climate change on our health.

Why did you focus on these two reports if the government agrees that it still lacks an overarching federal strategy to identify clear and concrete action? What would these reports have signified to you and to Canadians about adaptation and what's happening with respect to climate change?

The Chair: Mr. Cullen, your time has expired.

Commissioner Vaughn, you may respond briefly.

● (1635)

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Thank you very much.

These two reports are significant contributions from the government itself on identifying the impacts of climate change. The NRCan report identified climate change impacts by region and by province in Canada from fresh water to forestry to fisheries to infrastructure.

I think Health Canada's report is the largest single assessment that Health Canada has done on the human health risks related to climate change from an increase in West Nile disease, to Lyme disease, to an increase in heat alerts and what that means for vulnerable populations.

We looked at those reports, and we've said that overall some very good work is under way by the government from the four programs we've looked at. Their objectives are both to generate good information and then to share that information. We've said they're generating good information, and by and large they're sharing the information. The exceptions were that these two reports, probably the largest single undertaking of the Government of Canada from an analytical capacity, had a fairly nationwide rollout, and we've said in the end the government decided on a more restrained release. In the context of trying to inform Canadians of risk, this was probably not the obvious way of trying to get a clear message across to Canadians on climate change impacts.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Warawa, you get the last of the first round.

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

Thank you, Commissioner Vaughan and the witnesses, for being here.

I want to focus on adaptation. Nathan has started that discussion, and I appreciate what's already been said. Many of us around this table have a local government background, where it's up to local government and the engineers within each community to make sure that the infrastructure that is in place will adequately protect the community, safely and adequately remove storm water, and have a good, up-to-date, functioning system.

Typically we were dealing with an infrastructure that would handle a once-in-a-100-year storm. Now as we see our climate changing, that's one of the challenges for local governments. What do they have to do as a local community to prepare for a changing climate? What will be the impacts on this town and that town and this community?

My first question for you, Commissioner, is this. Your assessment period dealing with shipping and spills was a three-year period, 2007, 2008, and 2009. What period of the assessment looked at adaptation? Was it the same period?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: I can probably take a minute to get a clarification. I think we went a little further back. Some of the programs we looked at began in 2003. An INAC program, I believe, went back even a little earlier, and then some went a little forward, 2006 to 2007. There was a broader time period, yes.

Mr. Mark Warawa: In chapter 3, where you dealt with adaptation, the audit was completed on June 8 of this year. So that's when the assessment was completed, and then you compiled the information and the report.

Was the focus of the adaptation on the Canadian plan and how Canada is prepared to prepare for adaptation, or was it also focused internationally?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: It was exclusively on Canada.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Okay.

The report, which I found informative, talked about Canada's commitment to support adaptation internationally, arising from Bali. It's pages 4 and 5. There was a chart too. So you were aware that Canada had committed $400 million this fiscal year as part of Canada's share, but that wasn't part of the report or the assessment?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: No, that wasn't part of the assessment. We looked at the programs, which are focused on helping Canada adapt.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Okay.

In my own community, one of the issues we have in preparing for a change in climate is making sure that our diking system along the Fraser River is adequate. Through the economic action plan, our government improved the dikes, so we are prepared. Some infrastructure was also adapted and improved, for example, bridges and water systems and roads.

How important is it that the federal government has local government involved in the plans? Through the economic action plan, which the Auditor General gave the government a good report on, those dollars are out there and that infrastructure is being built right now. Was any of that included in your assessment?

● (1640)

Mr. Scott Vaughan: I'm glad you asked. At the planning of this, we contacted a number of different federal departments, including Infrastructure Canada. Infrastructure Canada told us that they do not have any plans related to climate change adaptation; they said they would respond to requests, as you say, from municipalities and provinces on the priorities the provinces put forward.

The scope of the ministries we looked at were a response to interviews we did across the board at the front end.

Mr. Mark Warawa: I appreciate what you're saying, and Environment Canada has agreed with your recommendations. But in a practical sense, what I experienced in our community is that there were a lot of improvements, built-in adaptation, improved infrastructure—right across Canada, in a very positive way. That will have long-term benefits.

Also, I believe the importance is that we help the countries that are poor. Their infrastructures are not at Canadian standards. Canada's participation, creating 1.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet providing 4% of the adaptation funding I think is admirable. It is definitely in the right direction to helping countries adapt to a changing climate.

Would you agree?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Actually, I couldn't agree more. We gave examples in the chapter, which I think are excellent examples, of the federal government—Natural Resources, Environment Canada, DFO—working with local communities as well as with provincial governments. We gave a couple of case studies: one in New Brunswick; another one in Clyde River, Nunavut. Those programs are successful because of the partnerships with local municipalities and provincial governments, and with the private sector as well.

I think this is a policy decision, but it's clear that given the magnitude of the future challenges of climate change, this is going to take multiple partnerships from many players.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you. I agree we need a plan, and we've agreed with your recommendations. But additionally, a lot is happening and it has been happening.

Would you agree?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: I would agree, and I hope we've described that accurately, to give some sense of the amount of good work going on in the four programs we've looked at.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to go to our five-minute rounds.

Ms. Murray, you have the floor first.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you.

Commissioner, you commented on concerns about the lack of information and the lack of leadership by this government on these programs overall. It is especially concerning that you are on record saying you're “troubled that the government is not ready to respond to a major oil spill”.

The Liberal Party of Canada has been concerned about that as well. As the commissioner probably knows, the Liberal leader made a commitment to formalizing the ban on increased tanker traffic around Haida Gwaii; implementing the integrated oceans management and ocean zoning in an expedited way; creating a world-class oil spill contingency plan; reviewing Canada's oil spill prevention and response capabilities and liability limits for companies; and halting all new leasing and current oil exploration in Canada's Arctic pending a good review and assurances that we're not at risk.

I appreciated the commissioner's frankness about the woeful state of things. Having worked with civil servants myself, I know it's not because there aren't good people and I know it's not because the people in the department don't care. It likely has to do with inadequate resources. As the commissioner pointed out, it's lack of leadership from this government.

I want to explore a bit more on chapter 1. When we're thinking about a major oil spill, a tanker that would potentially be in the central coast if a pipeline were to go to Kitimat...if we look at the dispersion of oil spills, on page 18 of the report, which of those means of dealing with the oil would be chosen if there were, say, a 35-knot southeaster blowing on the coast after that oil spill?

● (1645)

Ms. Jody Thomas: That's a very technical question. We would rely on the shipowner, our experts on the ground, and the response organization to make those kinds of risk assessments. I wouldn't want to speculate from here about what action would be taken on the water. I don't think that would be responsible.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

I know there's been an assessment of the extent of pollution from a major oil spill. And I think modelling may have been done by Environment Canada that showed that at a certain time of the year, with certain weather conditions, a single oil spill could foul the coastline from the tip of Vancouver Island to the southern tip of Alaska. That's the worst-case scenario.

As the agency responsible for responding, I notice that the standard here is 72 hours to have equipment in place to respond to a pollution event of over 10,000 tonnes of oil, which is one-quarter of the *Exxon Valdez* and just a fraction of what could happen with a panamax or a major supertanker. In 72 hours, how much could that oil already be fouling the beaches, the inlets, and the environment? How far would that oil travel in 72 hours, with a major wind?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: That would be speculation. We can't respond to that question, not knowing the details of the particular incident.

Ms. Joyce Murray: The standard is 72 hours to get there. We know that on the west coast, with its wild weather, the oil is going to be all over the place. It's industry's responsibility to respond, but the companies certainly don't have facilities in the 71 million square kilometres of Canada's oceans in which a spill could occur. Are there response agencies a company would use in that case?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: That's correct. There are four response corporations across the country with which shipowners are required to have response agreements.

Ms. Joyce Murray: How many bases do those response organizations maintain so that they would be nearby to deal with it?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: I don't have that information at hand, but I'd be happy to get back to you with respect to the various caches these organizations have.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Time has expired.

Mr. Calkins, you have the floor.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Time sure flies when you're having fun, doesn't it?

I would like to thank everyone for coming here today and for bringing your testimony. It certainly has been enlightening. I'm going to go fairly fast. I'll be looking for some relatively quick responses.

I'm going to start with you, Mr. Keenan.

In your presentation you talked about some of the issues the Government of Canada is pursuing, particularly with waste water system effluent regulations to phase out the dumping of untreated and undertreated sewage in Canadian waterways. This is in response, obviously, to some of the concerns the government has about water quality.

Could you tell us, for example, what the city of Montreal does? What's the volume of treated or undertreated sewage that's pumped into the St. Lawrence Seaway every year?

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you for the question.

The member is absolutely right in terms of moving forward on waste water effluent regs.

I don't actually have the stats for the city of Montreal here with me, but I do know that the city actually discharges a large amount of sewage that would not meet the standard of the proposed regs. In fact, for situations like the city of Montreal, the proposed regulations would have a phase-in period to provide municipalities with the chance to plan their infrastructure so that they can upgrade.

The second point I'd make is that the discharge of municipal waste water effluent is one of the key challenges in water quality around the St. Lawrence.

● (1650)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: My understanding is that it's about 1.3 billion cubic metres of effluent or discharge a year. To put that into a context that I think most Canadians would understand, that's enough to go over Niagara Falls for three hours. My question is whether we have any downstream monitoring sites on the St. Lawrence to monitor that, given the fact that the St. Lawrence would be a source of water for many communities along that waterway.

Mr. Michael Keenan: I will defer to my colleagues on that.

Mr. Dan Wicklum: We have extensive water quality monitoring on the Great Lakes and in the St. Lawrence River. We use two different types of monitoring. One is the type of monitoring the commissioner looked at, which is a long-term monitoring site. The other is a type of monitoring that the commissioner found was outside the scope of his audit, so he didn't include that. That's something we call CABIN, the Canadian aquatic biodiversity information network. Frankly, it's quite a paradigm shift for water quality monitoring. What we're actually doing is taking a look at the invertebrates—frankly, the bugs—that live at the bottom of rivers, and we're monitoring them over time to see if the species composition, the community, changes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You're doing benthic dredges, and so on, and going through all of these kinds of things, right?

Mr. Dan Wicklum: That's exactly what we're doing.

So we're quite excited about this. It's outside the scope of the audit. It would really change the findings of the commissioner, if it were inside the scope of the audit, because it's very much scientifically valid—and it's extremely cost-effective.

You can certainly miss things if you're going to measure water. Even if you measure water once a month for a year, you can miss a slug of a pollutant or something that goes through the system. But the philosophy is that the benthic invertebrates live there, and if they're being affected, we will measure that in the community changes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: It would bioaccumulate, and we could see these kinds of changes?

Mr. Dan Wicklum: Right, it could bioaccumulate and could change the communities.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: It's basic limnology, and it's great to see these things are actually happening.

I really did appreciate your response about the oil sands, that there are quite a few programs offered by the province when it comes to these kinds of things. I don't know if you can respond to these things directly, but the Province of Alberta has a long-term river network monitoring program. They have the river water quality index. They have a lakes monitoring program, which I'm sure the Government of Canada partners with them on.

I used to be a conservation officer. We talk about these water quality testing sites, and I can tell you that I used to test water all the time on various lakes and rivers. I would simply get out of my truck, walk down with a bottle, take the sample of water, and walk back up.

Unless the Commissioner of the Environment were there to watch me do that, I guess he wouldn't even know the watering site existed. So could you tell us how many of these kinds of water sampling and water sites exist? Does Environment Canada participate in these kinds of water quality monitoring practices?

Mr. Dan Wicklum: We do participate. We're highly leveraged in the provinces. We actually have formal agreements for water quality monitoring across the country with, for example, British Columbia, P.E.I., and Newfoundland. We also have an MOU on water that we signed with the whole suite of Atlantic provinces, and we have a number of other formal agreements we partner through. For example, with Ontario, there is something called the Canada-Ontario agreement.

In terms of specific pieces of information on how detailed our cooperation is with those groups, frankly, I'd have to go back and check with my colleagues who do that on a more operational level. But we do have an additional 505 sites—at least, cabin sites—that I mentioned, in addition to the ones the commissioner audited.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: It's hard to sneak by a good line-backer.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Calkins.

Madame Gagnon, *c'est votre tour*.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Thank you.

Good afternoon. This is the first time I have sat on the Standing Committee on the Environment. I am replacing my colleague Bernard Bigras who is in Cancún at the moment.

I am pleased to be here because there is an issue that is very important to me, and that is the issue of water contamination in Shannon.

In chapter 2, you talk about water monitoring. You make a somewhat disturbing observation. You say that the government has not defined its responsibilities in relation to water monitoring on federal lands, and that Environment Canada does not verify the data collected under the water quality monitoring program.

I am in contact with the Shannon residents' association, which has had to bring a class action against the government in relation to water contamination. I would first like to address Mr. McDonald, who is the assistant deputy minister of Transport.

Just now, Mr. Keenan said there was a basic principle in the department's responsibilities called "polluter-pay". I want to know whether the same basic principle applies to the environment. Because it is a lot easier to bring an action against an offender, an individual, than it is for an individual to do it against a government. I know something about that from the Shannon committee that has had to turn to other resources.

The residents' committee has had a lot of trouble getting data about the analyses that have been done. In fact, I had the support of all of the opposition in the House to get the documents produced.

A lot of departments have responsibilities relating to this contamination. There are National Defence and the environment department, for the water analyses. When there are several departments, how can we require that there be coordination, in the case of actions against the government, for example to make the job of the people bringing the action easier, when they want to get data and have accurate facts about the water they drink everyday?

The water has been contaminated by trichloroethylene for several years, and people didn't know about the quality of the water they were drinking everyday. There have been consequences. There has been a rise in cancer. In fact, the Department of Health also comes into this. So it lands on several doorsteps.

Would you have any recommendations to make? Also, have you observed the extent of the problem with the quality of this water, which is undrinkable and unfit for consumption?

● (1655)

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Thank you for the question. I will say, generally speaking, that one of the problems we noted in this chapter concerns the data from the Water Quality Monitoring Program. Environment Canada has no system for ensuring that the data from all the monitoring stations are reliable. That is why there is no system to ensure that the data from all the stations is accurate, or not. There is no system at Environment Canada that can assure us of this. As a result, the public can't know clearly whether there are water quality problems in certain lakes or rivers.

On the other hand, the National Hydrometric Program, for measuring water quantity, is a good system with reliable data.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: I have another question. When a department is involved in soil contamination that affects groundwater, could more draconian measures not be taken against the government?

You talk about polluter-pay. So when we know, and we determine, that there has been soil contamination that has extended to the groundwater, should funds not be allocated to the members of the public who are harmed, who didn't know what to expect?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Mr. Chair, may I ask my colleague Andrew Ferguson to answer that question?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Ferguson, you can come to the table.

Mr. Andrew Ferguson (Principal, Sustainable Development Strategies, Audits and Studies, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): I believe the question had to do with whether there is funding to help remediate groundwater pollution problems that are caused by, I could maybe say, government polluters. We didn't look at that question during the course of our audit work, and that would be a more appropriate question to ask the Department of Environment on whether there would be funding for remedial cleanup activities. It's not a question we examined in the audit.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: In the case of—

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaney, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Woodworth has agreed to share his time with me. So I am going to be brief.

My question is for you, Ms. Thomas.

In his report, the commissioner stated certain concerns regarding large spills. Today, the Commissioner of the Environment has mainly evaluated the management framework, and in the case of a spill, you are in fact somewhat reassuring. You are telling us that the Coast Guard is in a position to provide all the resources available, in collaboration with its partners.

Is that an accurate reflection of the reality?

Then, I will ask the commissioner whether he is satisfied with the explanations given today concerning large spills specifically. I think that question is of concern to a lot of people. So I would like to hear you on that question.

I will then yield the floor to my colleague.

● (1700)

[*English*]

Ms. Jody Thomas: With regard to major spills, the coast guard would work with all available partners to respond. The system remains a polluter pay and a polluter responsibility, so the shipowner would be primarily responsible and then the response organizations would be involved. If the shipowner were unable or unwilling to respond, then the coast guard would take over as the primary responder to the incident. It is very much a system of cascading resources to respond in the best possible way as a total partnership. No one agency can respond on its own.

If I go back to the question asked earlier regarding a spill the size of *Deepwater Horizon*, 16 countries supported the U.S. government, the national guard. It wasn't the U.S. coast guard on its own or any single federal agency; it was a multiplicity of support and response.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Commissioner, what do you have to say on that subject?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: At paragraph 47 of our report, we noted that the Coast Guard conducted an exercise in March 2010. In that exercise, it identified concerns relating to response systems for major spills. This was an internal Coast Guard review, which showed that there are gaps.

We made recommendations and we are satisfied with the responses given by the department.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you, commissioner.

I will leave the remaining time for Mr. Woodworth.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): I just want to begin with a question to the commissioner regarding the suggestion that there's only one federal monitoring station in the Athabasca system. In the course of many hours of testimony on the oil sands and water resources, I learned about an organization called RAMP, the Regional Aquatics Monitoring Program, in which the federal government is a partner.

If my memory serves me, they mentioned that they had about two million data points collected over 10 years of water monitoring in the Athabasca region. Can you explain to me, does your report include all of the water monitoring that the federal government does in partnership with agencies like RAMP or in other respects?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: We looked at the stations that are under the direct responsibility of the water quality program.

I will say a couple things related to that, if I may, sir.

First of all, I was very interested in Mr. Wicklum's comment. At the time of our audit, when our team went in, the station in Wood Buffalo National Park did not have the capacity to monitor PAHs. If that has happened since, then that's an excellent development.

Regarding the other part of the data that's generated both from CEMA and from RAMP, in the course of our work we asked, is that data then somehow entered into or does it become part of the data systems that the federal government maintains? The answer is no, because much of it is proprietary, as you know.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I agree that we need to integrate data, but I just wanted to be sure that you are not recommending that the federal government now discontinue dealing with water monitoring in partnership with others, including an agency like RAMP, or including provinces, or including all the water monitoring that private industry does and reports to the federal government.

You're not in any way being critical of the federal government for undertaking water monitoring in partnership with others. Am I right about that?

● (1705)

Mr. Scott Vaughan: There have been observations, for example, from the joint panel reviews on issues related to water quality and water quantity issues, but we didn't make any recommendations.

We've used that as one of several examples where—and I think this is the important point, if I may, sir—it would be important for Environment Canada to understand and do a risk analysis of where they think the largest risks are and then to make some resource allocations based on those risks.

Mr. Keenan alluded to the World Meteorological Organization standards that Canada has helped develop.

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth, your time has expired.

Mr. Andrews, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for coming, ladies and gentlemen.

My first question is to you, Ms. Thomas. In the commissioner's report he states, "...the Coast Guard is not able to determine how much oil spill response equipment it should have...."

If you can't determine how much equipment you should have, how do you know how you're going to respond to an oil spill?

Ms. Jody Thomas: We know how much equipment we have at a regional level. What we don't have is an overarching framework at a national level to determine where it is, and we don't have a life-cycle management system. That life-cycle management system is going to be put into place in the next fiscal year.

The management framework will be influenced by the risk assessment we're undertaking with Transport Canada, so that we ensure we have the right amount of equipment in the right locations. Right now it exists at a regional level. It's tested; it's monitored. We know what's out there, but we need that overarching management framework.

Mr. Scott Andrews: The commissioner also says that most of this equipment is out of date and needs to be updated. Even your coast guard staff says they're concerned about the level of investment in this equipment. Has the level of investment in this response been a concern of yours as well?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I've been in this job for about two and a half months, so I don't think I'm ready to respond to that question. However, we will complete our risk assessment and then we'll do a cost-benefit analysis of what the next steps have to be to ensure that the coast guard can respond.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Where's the highest risk for an oil spill right now in Canada? Is it the south coast of Newfoundland, in Placentia Bay?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: It's a difficult one to answer. Certainly, if we look at the east coast of Canada, it has the largest number of traffic movements at this point, roughly about 3,000 vessel movements, as opposed to about 50 on the—

Mr. Scott Andrews: What about tonnage? Tonnage-wise, would Placentia Bay be the highest tonnage of tanker traffic, supertanker traffic, in Canada right now?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: I cannot answer that definitively. I'd be happy to get back to you on that, though.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Okay. That leads into my next question. When the commissioner talks about the risk assessments needing updating, Transport Canada, as you know, did a south coast of Newfoundland assessment in 2007.

Mr. Gerard McDonald: That's correct.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Many would say that there has been no action from that assessment. Is that a fair statement to say?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: No, I don't think so. I know the coast guard has repositioned some resources as a result of that risk analysis, and I'll let Ms. Thomas answer that portion.

Ms. Jody Thomas: Yes, the coast guard has repositioned equipment, as I said in my opening statement, to respond to the increase in traffic there.

It's an evolving risk environment, so the risk assessment we will do with Transport Canada. Once it has been scoped and we determine what size the risk assessment needs to be, we'll be able to determine more accurately if we have enough equipment positioned in Placentia Bay, as an example. But in a response to this risk study that was done, we did increase the level of equipment that was in Placentia.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. McDonald, on this assessment for the south coast of Newfoundland, you're now doing another study. You studied it three years ago. You've now done an untendered contract to someone to study the capacity of response in Placentia Bay, and the commissioner has already told us that we don't need another study. What we need is government action on this kind of response. So why are you studying it again when you already have the data that we need to do more work in Placentia Bay?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: I'm sorry, I'm not aware of another study being done.

Mr. Scott Andrews: It's being done by your department.

Mr. Gerard McDonald: Okay. I'll have to look into that. I'm not aware of this particular study to which you're referring.

Mr. Scott Andrews: I have another question. You've talked about the certified response organizations in Canada. There are four, and two are in Nova Scotia. Have you given any consideration to the high-risk area in Placentia Bay having its own response organization there?

● (1710)

Mr. Gerard McDonald: No, that is not something we have considered at this point. The Placentia Bay area is covered by the Eastern Canada Response Corporation, and we feel they have adequate capacity to cover the risks that we're asking them to cover.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Ms. Thomas, in your statement you talked about the response strategy being ready and in place in the spring of 2011. Is there going to be any public or community input into this response strategy?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Generally, when we're conducting studies, we consult with our stakeholders and our partners, so I would say yes.

Mr. Scott Andrews: We're only three months away from having a —

Ms. Jody Thomas: We're scoping the response now, and we'll be discussing and consulting with stakeholders.

Mr. Scott Andrews: When you say "scoping the response", could you just please elaborate on that a little?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Well, we need to work with our partner departments to determine the size of the study, who's going to do it, what it's going to cost, before we launch into it.

The Chair: Thank you. The time has expired. I know it goes by quickly when you're having fun.

Mr. Woodworth, now it is your turn.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

Commissioner Vaughan, as always, I want to just clarify the extent of your study with respect to oil spills. I understand, for example, that your study did not examine prevention or detection activities. Is that correct?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Yes, that's correct, sir.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: And I understand in fact that your study and recommendations relate to management systems, including, for example, the documentation of activities. Is that correct?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: That is correct.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: For example, I understand that you discovered that Canada has 244,000 kilometres of coastline. Am I reading that correctly?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: I believe we did discover that, yes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: And that from 2007 to 2009 you discovered reports of 4,160 pollution incidents reported to the Canadian Coast Guard. Correct?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Correct.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: But it was not really within the purview of your study to determine, nor did you discover or report, any incidents of any inappropriately delayed response in any of those 4,160 pollution incidents. Correct?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: That's correct.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Again, it was not within the purview of your study, nor do you report, any incidents of any inadequate response to those 4,160 pollution incidents by the coast guard. Is that correct?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: If I may, on that one, it wasn't a question of inadequacy. The reason we brought to Parliament's attention the issue of documentation was we noted a number of quite serious data errors, number one. Number two, in terms of responses, they were reclassified during the course of the audit from a level 3 back to a level 2. That then raises the question, if it's a level 3, it's a greater extent of intervention—that was what was reported in the field—and then when it came to headquarters it went to level 2. It does raise the question that this information basically records the responses, and that's why we brought it to your attention.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I don't mean in any way to suggest that the proper record-keeping of an agency like the coast guard is not of good significance. I simply want to be absolutely clear of the difference between a complaint regarding inadequate record-keeping and a complaint regarding an actual inadequate response to an oil spill. That's really all I'm drawing attention to. It was not within the purview of your report, nor in fact did you report any indication of an inadequate response. Correct?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: That's correct, sir.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: And in a similar way, it was not within the purview of your report, nor do you report, any incident of an oil spill or any related matter that wasn't detected by the coast guard.

Mr. Scott Vaughan: That I would have to ask the coast guard, because we couldn't say with assurance whether the data were reliable or not.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: That's fine.

I did want to follow up on another item, though. In your report you did mention that there were three surveillance aircraft in the national aerial surveillance program run by Transport Canada. I'm pretty sure I've heard there were four.

Have you had an opportunity to double-check that?

● (1715)

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Yes, if I may ask my colleague, Mr. McKenzie, to provide some clarification.

Mr. Jim McKenzie (Principal, Sustainable Development Strategies, Audits and Studies, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): Thank you, Chair.

Sir, yes, we followed up on that. Transport Canada in fact has owned three surveillance aircraft. One is located in Ottawa and one is located in Moncton. The other is on the west coast. Since 2003 these aircraft have increased their surveillance hours. They've increased their capacity in terms of being able to fly and detect spills in different types of weather. That's partly due to the fact that they've significantly enhanced their surveillance capacity, the onboard equipment. Those aircraft are owned. They are two Dash-8s and a Dash-7. They also will make use of a contract, if necessary, through other government departments, for example, Fisheries and Oceans. If they are doing flights, they'll have them do patrols as well for surveillance.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

Perhaps I could just ask Mr. McDonald, so that I'm absolutely sure, whether in fact it isn't a timing issue, because I understand, Commissioner, your report was done in 2007, 2009. I just want to make sure there hasn't been another aircraft acquired since, because I want to track that down.

How many aircraft does the national aerial surveillance program operate? Three or four, Mr. McDonald?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: Mr. McKenzie answered the question correctly. We own three aircraft that are dedicated to that, but we do contract with PAL airlines in Newfoundland to do some surveillance there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Woodworth. Your time has expired.

Mr. Armstrong, you get the last of the second round.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Wicklum, you're the director general of water science and technology. I have a couple more questions about the Athabasca. You commented that the Athabasca is heavily monitored by several different agencies and stakeholders: RAMP, the Province of Alberta, the federal government, and others.

Would you say you're satisfied with the amount of supervision that goes on in the Athabasca River as far as water quality is concerned?

Mr. Dan Wicklum: I'll answer the question this way. We're a science organization. We always think we can do better, and we're always prepared to take advice, such as we get from the commissioner, and use it where applicable and get better.

I would say that the data the commissioner looked at is essentially long-term water quality monitoring from Environment Canada. Even inside the suite of other organizations that collect long-term water quality, it's still actually only a very small part of the data that are collected. We have another whole type of monitoring that we do in Environment Canada, a formula that we call “surveillance monitoring”. It's short-term monitoring. We use it to ask very specific questions quickly and then reallocate our resources onto other, more high-priority areas.

For example, right now we're in the middle of doing surveillance monitoring in groundwater on the Athabasca River on almost 100 sites. This actually is a very large part of the additional work we're doing as a result of oil sands activity. We have quite a scientific challenge in the Athabasca, because you can go into the river and you can find toxic things, naphthenic acids and polyaromatic hydrocarbons, for example, but you can't definitively say whether they're coming from a natural source or from an anthropogenic or man-made source. The reason there's an oil sands mining sector there is because there are oil sands and the Athabasca River cuts through those oil sands directly. You can go there, down onto the banks of that river, and you can actually watch bitumen follow the bank of the river, into the river, and in all of the tributaries as well.

This is a scientific challenge, and when we find things, we have to be able to attribute the source. So we started about 18 months ago what we call a fingerprinting operation, investing significantly. We have an additional $1.6 million that we're investing in this whole program. The goal is to identify unique substances that occur only because of man-made structures or processing of oil sands. This is going to allow us actually to go in and essentially say, yes, this toxic compound at this concentration in the river came from the oil sands operations or mining activity.

We actually do a lot more than that. We have a lot of toxicity testing, so we have a whole suite of organisms that we use to test how toxic tailings ponds effluents are, how toxic the tailings ponds sediments are. Then we actually go into the river and do the same thing. So are there any toxic effects in the river and actually in the water or in the sediments? At this point we just can't find any.

So we actually have quite a broad suite of science activities that we do. We do these in partnership also with other types of multi-stakeholder groups. We talked about RAMP and the long-term water quality monitoring in the river. They actually monitor the water quality in what we call “acid-sensitive lakes”, up to 50 lakes around the area as well.

There's also another multi-stakeholder group called the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association, which essentially performs the same function that RAMP does, but for the atmosphere. In a multi-stakeholder setting, it takes a look at air quality and aerial deposition that potentially could happen on the land base. Then we're tracking to see whether or not any of that deposition gets into the river itself through snow melt.

So we actually have what we feel is a very comprehensive science program.

● (1720)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Terrific. And do you feel that the partners you've worked with in this program are all working cooperatively and above board, trying to make sure that things are running the way they should be in the Athabasca River?

Mr. Dan Wicklum: Again, in terms of the science in our organization, we fundamentally have formally ingrained in ourselves a philosophy of continual improvement. So we think we do well; we think we can get better.

An expression of this is that the past environment minister, Minister Prentice, did name an independent panel of five prominent, leading Canadian scientists to give him an independent assessment of the state of monitoring in the oil sands, and he gave them a 60-day mandate. They are to report on December 16. We welcome that. We actually are quite looking forward to it, because no matter how good we are, we do feel that we can improve, and we are willing to do that.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you.

Mr. Keenan, just going to the other coast for a moment, there's been a great deal of work to clean up the Sydney tar ponds. Could you update us on that project?

Mr. Michael Keenan: There has been a great deal of work to do that. I'm afraid I don't have a lot of knowledge.

I'm going to invite my colleague, Sue Milburn-Hopwood, to answer that.

Is that fair, Sue?

Mrs. Sue Milburn-Hopwood (Director General, Environmental Protection Operations, Department of the Environment): It will be a short answer.

Thank you for the question. I don't have all the details with me today. It actually is a project that's managed by Public Works as well as the Province of Nova Scotia. But I think this is something that we could certainly prepare a response on and get back to your committee.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Could you tell me the when the project, the actual digging, began or was announced?

Mrs. Sue Milburn-Hopwood: I can't tell you. There have been several stages of it, so I can't. But I could certainly provide you with the chronology of that. There have been a number of different starts of different phases, and I don't think I could do it with any accuracy at this point.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: But the most progress has been made over the last several years. Is that true?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Armstrong's time has run out.

Before we turn to the third round, I want to ask a couple of questions myself.

Commissioner Vaughan, I appreciate that in your look at water quality you cited Lake Winnipeg and the Lake Winnipeg basin initiative, something that's very near and dear to my heart, my riding, and the province of Manitoba.

I think you said there is a concern about the number of federal sites. There have been some added. I was wondering whether you looked at the collaboration that's happening between Environment Canada and the Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Ontario, since all those provinces are a part of the basin, and the entire basin drains from those areas into Lake Winnipeg and ultimately up into the Churchill and up to Churchill and Hudson Bay. As well, there are four states involved in that project.

Did you look at the role they're playing in the overall work on this initiative?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Mr. Chair, let me respond, and I'll ask my colleague, Andrew Ferguson, to provide some more.

We said that every province has an agreement or an MOU on the water quantity monitoring side with the federal government and with the provinces. On the water quality side, there are four agreements: with Manitoba, as you've said, as well as with Newfoundland and Labrador, P.E.I., and British Columbia.

Then, as you have alluded to, the federal government has important responsibilities because of other interprovincial or transboundary.... Those are particularly on the water quantity side. We said those were functioning quite well.

Mr. Ferguson.

Mr. Andrew Ferguson: From a water quality perspective, what we've found in the audit is that the department has water quality monitoring agreements federally with British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland, and no such provincial-level agreements with any of the other provinces for water quality monitoring.

What we also looked at in the audit was whether the department, which purports to have a program for monitoring the status of Canada's rivers and lakes and trends in aquatic ecosystem health, had the data and the information necessary to do it at a national level. We recognize that there are lots of provincial and proprietary data bases available, but we found that this data is not integrated at a national level to provide the federal government with the capacity to understand the status of Canada's freshwater resources or trends in aquatic ecosystem health.

So it's at this higher level that we were looking at the department's activities.

There is a lot of monitoring going on. It's disaggregated, the quality of the data is questionable, and there is no capacity at the federal level to understand the idea of the status of these lakes or trends in aquatic ecosystem health.

In this case in Winnipeg, it was in 2006 that the province requested the federal government to get involved. The federal government has gotten involved and has provided some budgeting, as has been mentioned today, for cleanup activities.

The purpose of these programs is to get ahead of the curve, to understand emerging trends before they become problems, so that they can be dealt with proactively. We don't see, in this case, that this has happened.

● (1725)

The Chair: I have been requesting since 2004 to have the study done on Lake Winnipeg, so I'm glad it did start happening in 2007.

The one criticism I have is that in the commentary you provided on the case study on Lake Winnipeg, they said there were suspicions about nutrient loading from agricultural activity. It's not just agriculture. Municipalities' dumping of effluent is a big concern throughout the entire watershed, especially coming up the Red River, from the United States as well. So that was a concern.

But I want to ask Mr. Wicklum a question, because I believe he's been working on this as well, overseeing.

I just finished having a really good public meeting in Gimli about the Lake Winnipeg basin initiative. Environment Canada scientists were there explaining all the great work they're doing along with all the different partners they have in the project.

This summer I had the opportunity to go out on the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium platform in the ship *Namao*. Environment Canada was on board, and they were dropping rosettes and doing water quality monitoring all through the basin; they were out there for a few months. It's not just that they have a station. They have people on board a ship going up and down the lake, finding out where we have algae problems, looking at aquatic species, and also looking at the nutrient loads and doing that analysis.

I wonder if you have anything to add.

Manitoba Water Stewardship was on board, as well as the Lake Winnipeg Foundation. So you have various community groups and people who are concerned, working alongside both the province and the federal government.

Mr. Dan Wicklum: Yes, Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to comment.

Environment Canada has been monitoring the major tributaries of Lake Winnipeg for 30 years, so we've been watching the Red River and the Saskatchewan River. That's one of the main reasons why the Province of Manitoba approached the Government of Canada and said, we think we have an issue here in Lake Winnipeg, but we should help clean it up—it was because of Environment Canada data.

That's exactly what monitoring is supposed to do; it's supposed to identify issues. So frankly, what happened is that we used our data—we have a well-designed system to flag a problem—and we launched the Lake Winnipeg basin initiative. It is a $17.7 million initiative over four years.

Mr. Chair, if I may, I will expand a little bit on Mr. Ferguson's comment that the Government of Canada is not in a position to report on national water quality trends. We feel that through our Canadian environmental sustainability indicators we actually do report on trends. We have 153 CESI sites—Canadian environmental sustainability indicator sites—and what we do is take all the data we collect at those sites and synthesize it into a single number, a single parameter, which makes it easy to communicate.

One of the real challenges with monitoring data is that you have all sorts of numbers, but how do you communicate to people in a very simple way, but so that you don't lose the information? Using the CESI, which we report annually—and starting this year we will report as part of our federal sustainable development strategy—we feel that we have quite a good level of knowledge of water quality at the national level. This is exactly what our program was designed to do through CESI.

The Chair: Mr. Keenan.

Mr. Michael Keenan: Mr. Chair, may I add to that with one small point?

Just to pick up on Mr. Wicklum's point with respect to the CESI program, CESI started in 2004 on a time-limited basis; in the 2010 budget the government made CESI a permanent program and funded it on an ongoing basis.

This has enabled us to expand the CESI program and make it a more effective tool for getting the information that Dan is describing out to the public. We have gone from a traditional annual report that is printed and filed to a website that we update on a regular basis throughout the year. It's interactive; it has geo-mapping capacities built into it. So any Canadian, through the www.ec.gc.ca site, can go in and can look at the sum of this water quality science for hundreds of locations across the country and can zero in on the ones that are important and can look at trends over time.

We have also taken that program and have built it, as Dan said. We're using it as an indicator set on the federal sustainable development strategy so that we can, in a fairly structured way, report to Canadians on the resources that are spent on water quality, the results that are being achieved, and how they compare to the targets established by the government.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you.

Because we started late, I'm going to allow one quick question per party.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Chair, I have commitments that I have to go to, so I'd like to move that we leave early.

An hon. member: It's past 5:30.

The Chair: On a point of order, I'll hear Monsieur Ouellet.

An hon. member: It's non-debatable.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Chair, Mr. Vaughan said just now that he could answer the question I asked about the *Irving Whale*. I would ask him, if possible—and I don't want to bother him, if he would answer us in writing about the consequences of the *Irving Whale* accident, between 2007 and 2009.

[*English*]

The Chair: Even though we have a set time to adjourn, I need unanimous consent to adjourn a meeting, actually. I don't have unanimous consent to adjourn, so we're going to continue. But with respect to time, I want it to be just one quick question per party, and we'll do a quick round.

I am going to start with Ms. Murray, and then we'll go to Monsieur Ouellet.

It's just one quick—

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Woodworth made a comment that the focus of the commissioner was on record-keeping and not on actual results. But there is a very important piece between record-keeping and analysis of results, and that is that there is the plan, the capacity, the trained people, the understanding to respond. What I think the commissioner was concerned about is that there isn't that.

Ms. Thomas, as the lead agency for responding to a spill, we found that there was no up-to-date emergency management in place in your agency. But your agency would be working in partnership probably with B.C. Parks, Parks Canada, the emergency plan provincially, the emergency plan federally. Have you therefore ensured that the plans of your partners are in place and that the partners you would be counting on to work with you at the provincial and federal levels have plans, that they are up to date, and that they are adequate so that you know the response can take place?

And I meant Public Safety Canada and the Ministry of Public Safety, B.C.

Ms. Jody Thomas: Right. No, we haven't done that verification. I can't say we've audited or questioned our partners. There is a federal emergency response plan that is coordinated by Public Safety. It is exercised. We are part of that. For a major spill of any significance, the FERP would probably be activated and coordinated so that there is a total response by federal and provincial—

Ms. Joyce Murray: As the lead agency, you're going to want to know that everybody else's plans are good. We saw that with H1N1. The lead agency was not responsible for all of the partners actually having plans and being able to do what they needed to do for the total package, meaning that there were problems. So do you have plans to ensure that your partners actually can contribute and that they do have emergency plans, are trained, and have the equipment?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Well, that validation would certainly be a very useful part of the risk assessment we're doing, and of our assessment of our own capacity and our emergency management plans.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Clearly your plan, if it's only in the scoping stage, hasn't had the consultation and will not even be in time for this year's budget, never mind completed by March 2011, as my colleague Mr. Andrews was getting at.

Ms. Jody Thomas: The risk assessment will not be completed, but we had an internal audit done by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans earlier this year, so we've started some of this work in terms of the scoping of the risk assessment and our own internal management program as a result of that audit.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Murray.

Monsieur Ouellet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: I would like to ask Mr. Vaughan again whether it is possible to answer us in writing about the effects of the sinking of the *Irving Whale*, between 2007 and 2009.

I also have a short question for you. I would like to come back to the subject of climate change. Between 2007 and 2009, there was no plan. Did you identify what negative effects the absence of a plan or strategy may have had on Canada?

● (1735)

Mr. Scott Vaughan: The plan for—

Mr. Christian Ouellet: For climate change.

Mr. Scott Vaughan: I think one of the consequences we noted is that there are a lot of measures, of initiatives, on the part of each department. There are examples of coordination, but it was the government that announced it needed a federal strategy or federal plan to properly coordinate the measures taken by all departments to respond to the impacts of climate change.

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup.*

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Chair.

Very briefly, on a small point of order, there were two reports mentioned earlier in our committee hearings: "Human Health in a Changing Climate" by Health Canada and "From Impacts to Adaptation: Canada in a Changing Climate 2007" by Natural Resources. The point of order I'm asking for is that the committee request that those documents be made available to us. I know there are various officials in the room—

The Chair: That's not a point of order, but the committee can make that request.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Chair.

I have a question for you, Mr. Vaughan. We've heard from the coast guard and Transport Canada that they work in partnerships to develop these oil spill response plans. This is 20 years after the government promised to have a government plan to deal with this. I'm trying to equate this to other things in our daily lives that we can relate to. I don't think anybody in the room would send their kids to a school that had no evacuation plan, didn't know where the fire extinguishers were, didn't know if they worked, and didn't go through drills in responding to a fire. I'm being a bit dramatic, but the drama of an oil spill in the middle of the night on the west coast or east coast of Canada or in the Arctic is of huge significance to all of us.

Are you feeling more assured today that Transport Canada and the coast guard have said, be that as it may, 20 years have gone by and we don't have a national plan, which we promised to do, but we're working with companies, and we trust the plans they've put forward to us? They may or may not be public—we don't know. Is that good enough to have Canadians rest assured that the supertankers on our coast, if they hit ground—heaven forbid—will be cleaned up and contained adequately?

Mr. Scott Vaughan: Chair, what I can say is that we are assured by the responses to the recommendations that each of the three departments has made and the regime that is in place. We don't comment on the underlying principles. The underlying principle is the polluter pays principle, as Mr. McDonald said. We've identified areas that we thought were of significant interest for Parliament. Each of the departments has agreed and has responded with recommendations.

I would also say, if I might, that over the course of this audit, we looked at the management systems. The people who work in the coast guard, in Transport Canada, and in Environment Canada are committed public servants who go out every day, often in dangerous conditions, to protect Canadians. They have my personal enormous respect. I think our recommendations are building on a very strong basis. These are management systems that we think are important, but we look forward to those gaps being closed and the system being improved.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Blaney.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you. Mr. Chair, I would like to hear from Mr. Keenan. I think he had a few comments he wanted to add on that subject. Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Keenan: *Merci bien.*

I wanted to come back and clarify the point about whether or not there is a plan to deal with the impacts of climate change in the context of the commissioner's report. There is a difference between a plan and a strategy. The commissioner has asked that there be a clear adaptation policy framework, and there is one under development. It's important to clarify that there is in place—and there has been since late 2007—a clear action plan on the part of the federal government to help Canadians understand and prepare for the impacts of climate change and to adapt to them.

That $85.9 million in programming is focused on improving the science scenarios. We understand what's going to happen. NRCan has $30 million in programming funds to create information and risk assessment tools. They pull together regional adaptation collaborators as well as leaders in a local area and help them to better understand and plan for these eventualities. I think INAC has funded 170 projects in 73 northern communities to enable them to plan, develop, do risk assessments, and put into place local strategies to deal with this.

There is a range of programming that's in place, so there is an action plan. I didn't want the committee to think that there is not a federal action plan to deal with climate change impacts. The commissioner has pointed out that while there is an action plan, there is not necessarily an overarching adaptation framework. We accept that point, and we are working across government to develop an adaptation framework to guide future action plans in this area.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney: So this action plan was in fact included in the 2007 budget, is that right?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Keenan: Yes, I think it was. I'm not sure which budget it was in, but it was announced in late 2007 by the former Minister of the Environment who is the current Minister of Environment, Minister Baird—

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Keenan.

Mr. Michael Keenan: It has rolled out since then.

The Chair: Before we adjourn, I wanted to add that there is some homework for all of you, because there were some questions that were asked of members.

Mr. Ouellet was asking for a written response from the commissioner, and that can happen. Mr. Armstrong asked for an update on the tar ponds cleanup in Sydney. Mr. Andrews has requested two things from Mr. McDonald: the high-risk areas for spills and the recent study on Placentia Bay. I think there is also a question from Mr. Cullen for Mr. McDonald on whether or not the plan that you guys have been developing is public. We need to find out about that. Madame Gagnon asked Mr. Ferguson for a response to her question, and we'll check the blues if you have any concerns and get back to you.

If we can have those back in writing, we'd appreciate it.

I want to thank all the witnesses for taking the time to be with us and for answering the questions. Commissioner, thank you for your report and for providing this type of direction.

Could I have a motion to adjourn?

Mr. Scott Andrews: I so move.

The Chair: We're out of here.

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