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Chair

Mr. Mark Warawa

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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• (1635)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC)): I will call the meeting to order now that the minister is here with us.

I want to welcome everyone to this 26th meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. We have approximately one hour with the minister and department.

Minister, I'll just let you get your talking points ready, and you can start at your convenience.

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for this abbreviated session, circumstances being what they are.

With me today are my deputy minister, Paul Boothe; the CEO of Parks Canada Agency, Alan Latourelle; vice-president of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, Mr. Yves Leboeuf; assistant deputy minister, science and technology branch at Environment Canada, Dr. Karen Dodds; and Environment Canada's chief financial officer, Carol Najm.

As we look forward to the next 12 months, our government is keenly interested in striking the right balance between economic renewal and environmental protection. We need to ensure that our natural resources are developed in an environmentally sustainable manner while we maximize economic growth, competitiveness, and the creation of good long-term jobs for Canadians.

[Translation]

As you all know, Environment Canada is a regulatory department. Its main function is to develop, implement, monitor and enforce national, science-based environmental regulations and standards.

[English]

One of our focuses this year will be to streamline and to increase the efficiency and transparency of our regulatory processes so that we can make them more efficient and more effective. We intend to take our proven track record of regulatory excellence to the next level as Environment Canada is committed to operating as a world-class regulator.

As regulations define many of our efforts at Environment Canada, these changes will be a key component in enabling this department to achieve many of its goals for Canadians. Those include carrying out our commitment to reduce this country's greenhouse gas emissions by 17% over 2005 base levels by 2020. Canada is

already one-quarter of the way towards reaching its 2020 target through our sector-by-sector approach.

We have targeted the transportation and electricity sectors—the two largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada. We have introduced new emissions regulations for cars and trucks in the transportation sector. We are now addressing the electricity sector by refining the regulations and creating new performance standards for coal-fired electricity generation, and we will continue to make progress by addressing emissions from other major emitting sectors.

[Translation]

But as we all know our efforts alone are not enough. On the international stage, Canada has been playing an active role in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change since its inception, and has worked constructively with other countries over the past several years to launch the negotiations process on a new international climate change agreement for the future. The Durban Platform for Enhanced Action took another step forward by setting out a negotiating mandate for all countries to develop a single, new, international treaty to include all major emitters, to be implemented by 2020.

While these are significant aims, we recognize that a lot of work still needs to be done.

[English]

One direction we're pursuing is taking action where the needs are most pressing and where the resources to act are most limited. As part of our commitment to provide our fair share of fast-start financing, the Government of Canada has contributed \$1.2 billion in new and additional climate change financing.

We will be supporting a range of projects and programs in some of the world's neediest and poorest countries. Already these funds have helped to address deforestation and forest degradation and to ensure food security and provide adaptation assistance.

Here at home, we're continuing to press forward in our work towards achieving this country's full potential as a clean energy superpower. We're building the appropriate framework, and we're building it on environmental regulations and standards that are based on clear and transparent policies and practices.

We're also continuing to make great progress in ensuring that future growth of the oil sands will be done in a responsible and a sustainable manner.

With the release of our integrated environment monitoring plan for the oil sands last July, we outlined what we needed to have and what we needed to do in order to develop a world-class monitoring program for this important resource.

As you know, last month, with my colleague from Alberta, Minister McQueen, I announced the joint Canada-Alberta implementation plan for oil sands monitoring. This world-class, science-based program will provide Canadians with the necessary rigorous scientific data to ensure that this resource is developed in an environmentally sustainable manner. Most importantly, this program will make Canada's oil sands monitoring among the best in the world.

Moreover, our clean air agenda will ensure cleaner air and a cleaner environment for all Canadians. Under this agenda, we are identifying emerging air quality issues, measuring and monitoring the status of existing issues, and evaluating solutions.

Under the next phase of Canada's chemicals management plan, we're also working to protect Canadians from harmful chemicals by assessing and regulating a multitude of chemicals used in thousands of industrial and consumer products. This is one of the many ways in which Environment Canada is earning a reputation as a world-class regulator, and we continue to build on that reputation.

● (1640)

[Translation]

Furthermore, the department is carrying out its mandate to protect and conserve Canada's rich and abundant biodiversity. For example, under our new St. Lawrence Plan we are working with Quebec to ensure water quality, protect ecologically sensitive areas and conserve the incredible biodiversity of the St. Lawrence.

[English]

Additionally, the department is enhancing our weather and warning service across the country so that it continues to provide Canadians with a comprehensive national weather, water, and climate monitoring system.

As for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, Mr. Chair, our focus remains on supporting the Canadian economy and the sustainability of the environment through the delivery of timely, high-quality environmental assessments. Through this practice, we aim to prevent adverse environmental effects, in a cost-effective manner, before project construction begins.

Since we last met, Parks Canada celebrated its 100th anniversary. To date, it has expanded existing parks and created new ones to the point where Canada now protects close to 100 million hectares—about 10% of our entire land mass.

I could talk at length about our accomplishments and our future goals, but I trust I've left you with a clear sense of our direction and our actions.

I would now like to turn, with your permission, to the estimates documents that are before Parliament for consideration.

There are three main documents: the supplementary (B) and (C) estimates for the 2011-12 fiscal, and the main estimates for the 2012-13 fiscal. We'll be looking at these estimates for my portfolio,

including Environment Canada, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, and Parks Canada.

Let's start with the supplementary (B) estimates, the second request to adjust funding allocations this fiscal year.

For Environment Canada, we're requesting \$135.4 million in additional funding. This funding will go largely towards major initiatives such as the clean air regulatory agenda, or CARA III; the chemical management plan; the monitoring and supercomputing, or MSC, infrastructure; phase two of the federal contaminated sites action plan; the federal adaptation program; and clean transportation.

Parks Canada is requesting \$30.1 million in additional funding, which includes funding for emergency response to natural disasters and unanticipated health and safety-related capital repairs; the Trans Canada Trail completion and promotion; the War of 1812 horizontal initiative, to support bicentennial commemoration of the War of 1812; phase two of the federal contaminated sites action plan; to help Canadians adapt to climate change under Canada's clean air agenda; and grants to the Tulita District Lands Corporation as a step toward completion to the establishment of the Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency requested \$2.1 million in contributions to fund public participation and to lead aboriginal consultations for environmental assessments of major development projects.

Now let's turn to the supplementary (C) estimates, the final request for adjustments to our funding allocations for this fiscal year.

Environment Canada is not asking for additional funding in these estimates. It is requesting permission to reallocate existing funds within the department. The majority of these funds will be used for significant initiatives such as advancing Canada's international climate change actions, the international climate strategy, and fast-start financing, and conserving ecologically sensitive land.

● (1645)

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, let's turn now to the main estimates, the first request for departmental funding for the next fiscal year. Environment Canada is requesting \$972.7 million in these main estimates. This amount represents a \$100.6-million increase over last year's main estimates, which is due mainly to program increases for the Clean Air Agenda, Canada's Chemical Management Plan, the Federal Contaminated Sites Action Plan, and Canada's weather services.

These estimates will inform Canada's domestic regulatory approach to greenhouse gas emissions, providing a platform to further engagement with the United States on climate change issues and enhancing Canada's visibility as an international leader in clean energy technology.

[English]

They will help to address health and environmental risks posed by harmful chemicals by accelerating the pace of the risk assessment to address the legacy of unassessed substances under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, by 2020. Also, they will allow the department to continue its work of assessing and remediating contaminated sites through the federal contaminated sites action plan. Lastly, they will give Environment Canada the leverage to improve Canada's weather services by ensuring the integrity of the Government of Canada's weather and environmental supercomputer for the Meteorological Service of Canada.

As for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, the 2012-13 main estimates propose a net decrease of \$13 million in comparison to the agency's 2011-12 main estimates. This would bring the total 2012-13 budget to \$17 million. This decrease, as most of you know, is largely attributable to the sunseting of the Major Projects Management Office—MPMO—initiative and aboriginal consultation. These initiatives will be reviewed as part of the normal process for funds that have sunsetted, which will inform the government's decision on its renewal.

Moving forward to the 2012-13 main estimates for Parks Canada, the request totals \$648.2 million. This reflects a net decrease of \$42.3 million from the 2011-12 main estimates. The major changes in funding compared to the previous year represent reductions in funding needs for the planned completion of a section of the Trans-Canada Highway in Banff National Park, for the transfer of e-mail, data centre, and network services to Shared Services Canada, and the funding received to implement the Species at Risk Act.

Increases, on the other hand, will largely go towards emergency responses to natural disasters, federal contaminated sites, and to support additional building of the Trans-Canada Trail.

Mr. Chair, this highlights just some of the objectives that these estimates will support in the department's work to provide Canadians with a clean, safe, and sustainable environment.

I would again like to thank you and this committee for your time today, Mr. Chair, and I would be happy to take your questions at this time.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate the brief and the explanation.

Colleagues, the first round is normally seven minutes long. I'm going to make it six minutes. I'll have to keep our time quite tight because we're running late and I want to give as many people as possible an opportunity to ask questions.

Ms. Rempel, we'll begin with you. You have six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Minister Kent, on behalf of all of the committee members here, thank you for appearing before us today.

Deputy Minister Boothe, we also appreciate the time that you and your colleagues are taking to prepare and inform us about the estimates.

Just as a preamble, I think it's important to note that on both sides of the table here, while we may not always agree on approach, I think everyone has the protection of the environment at heart when we're dealing with policy. I thought it would behoove us to re-emphasize some of the key points that are outlined in the estimates and that lead to that approach.

In particular, I would like to highlight the efforts we've undertaken to tackle the challenge of global warming. Some of the efforts that we've undertaken and are reflected in the estimates include: the commitment to reduce Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020; investments in clean technologies, including next generation biofuels and carbon capture and storage; and active and constructive participation in United Nations negotiations to develop a new international climate change agreement.

I do think it's fair to say that these estimates reflect our government's intention to work with our partners at home and internationally for the continued protection of Canada's valued and diverse environmental legacy and for the greater advancement of worldwide environmental protection efforts.

Just to start my line of questioning, as there are many new members on the committee here, I would like to talk a little bit about the process by which estimates are developed. So I thought that first and foremost, Minister, perhaps you could take some time to do that.

Could you inform the committee about how the estimate process works? For example, how do your reports on plans and priorities work in conjunction with the departmental performance reports? Maybe you could take a few moments to elaborate on that.

Hon. Peter Kent: Sure. Well, with regard to the dollar process, it is done in consultation with the department, with the various agencies within the department. It looks at anticipated changes in priorities and in spending obligations.

With regard to the actuarial details, I will refer that question.

Ms. Carol Najm (Assistant Deputy Minister, Finance Branch, Department of the Environment): Thank you, Minister.

The estimates are tabled in the House of Commons by the president of the Treasury Board. They're made up of three parts. The first part is the government expense plan. This plan highlights an overview of the federal spending and summarizes the relationship between the key elements in the main estimates and the current expense plan. That's part I.

Part II is the main estimates. The main estimates are what support the Appropriation Act. They identify the spending authorities in the votes and the amounts to be included in subsequent appropriation bills. Parliament will be asked to approve these votes to enable the government to proceed with its spending plans.

Parts I and II of the main estimates are tabled concurrently on or before the first of March.

Part III, which contains the departmental expenditure plans, is divided into two parts: the report on plans and priorities and the departmental performance plans. In the report on plans and priorities, individual expenditure plans are elaborated on, and departments and agencies provide more detail with respect to the level of activities and contain information on strategic outcomes, initiatives, planned results, and links to the resource requirements over a three-year period. These documents are normally tabled in the fall.

So that's sometimes the difference between the contents of the main estimates and what you would find in the report on plans and priorities.

• (1655)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: If I can just interject quickly, in the House this session we've had many questions about reductions in funding to specifically CEAA and SARA, when in fact these are sunseting funds. Perhaps you could take a brief moment, prior to everyone else asking questions, to explain the difference between sunseting funds and cuts.

Hon. Peter Kent: I'll take that question.

Basically, programs are created for specific periods of time. CEAA is one that regularly reaches the end of a term and needs to be reviewed and assessed, and new requests are put forward for continued funding. That is what we have done and will do for CEAA.

A year ago, the questions were with regard to reductions in several of the other sunsetted areas—CARA, the contaminated sites, and the freshwater program. By having a set period for funding, it ensures a thoughtful, careful review of the program in the years of its assigned period, and for a return to Parliament to request continued and renewed funding.

That's essentially what's happening with CEAA.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The time has expired.

We will now go to Ms. Leslie for six minutes.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Minister, as well as everybody else who's here. Thank you for your time.

My questions are about the environmental assessment agency cuts and first nations. The main estimates show a cut in financial resources for the agency, about 43%, and regardless of whether that's sunsetted funds or not, it's still a reduction.

The explanatory notes say that funding for the participant funding program will be cut by \$1.1 million, and funding for aboriginal consultation will be cut by \$1.1 million.

In a presentation prepared by the agency in November 2010, the agency was advising a committee of deputy ministers about risks related to the underfunding of aboriginal consultation in relation to the gateway. It says:

Lack of funding may limit the ability of aboriginal groups to reasonably and meaningfully participate in the consultation and environmental assessment process. If aboriginal groups cannot consult meaningfully due to a lack of resources and capacities, and if the Crown fails to provide adequate funding, [there is a] moderate to high risk that the courts would find the consultation process to be unreasonable.

Has the department done any analysis of the costs that might be incurred by delays due to court actions concerning the gateway, but also other projects like this?

Hon. Peter Kent: That consideration is certainly front of mind. You're quite right. Our government takes a whole-of-government approach with regard to aboriginal consultation. There has been a transfer of funds, as you can read in the main estimates this year, to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to support consultation. We have a statutory requirement with regard to consultations on major projects, whether under CEAA or under the National Energy Board, in the case of the Enbridge Northern Gateway process. Those funds are assigned to enable aboriginal consultation for those first nations communities and citizens in proximity to the proposed project, just as there is a statutory requirement to support the appearance of non-first-nations residents in project areas.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thank you.

Mr. Minister, to that end, Mr. Leboeuf, who is vice-president of operations at CEAA and who is here today, during his testimony last fall about CEAA, said:

If the budgets are reduced, we will have to reassess the way in which we meet our obligations under the law.

This is very concerning.

My question is how will the crown discharge its duty to first nations communities in light of the cuts to the agency? I don't think that's clear.

Hon. Peter Kent: As I said, it is a whole-of-government process. Several departments have responsibility for supporting and participating in first nations consultation. With regard to the dollar amounts and the estimates and Mr. Leboeuf's look-ahead for the coming year, I'd invite his interjection.

• (1700)

Mr. Yves Leboeuf (Vice-President, Operations, Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency): Thanks, Minister.

As Minister Kent mentioned, these are not cuts but rather sunseting funding at this point in time. We are certainly looking forward to the renewal of this funding, but we will obviously have to wait until the budget to see whether or not these funds are renewed. As appropriate, and as I mentioned the last time I appeared, if the funds are not renewed we'll have to adjust our priorities. If they are renewed, then we'll continue our operations.

With respect to the Enbridge Northern Gateway funding and the presentation you referred to from November 2010, since then \$636,000 in additional funding has indeed been provided to the aboriginal groups in relation to the Enbridge Northern Gateway review. Additional funding is expected to be provided for consultation on the final report when we get to that point.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thank you.

I'll move on to the PEARL research lab, which I'm sure you're all familiar with. Funding for PEARL is running out and the lab will shut its doors pretty soon—if it hasn't already—which means that a significant taxpayer investment is really just going to be thrown away. We would have thought some of the climate change funding would have been used to support PEARL, but I'm unable to find where this would be. The amount of \$35 million was announced to replace the expired funding, but it has yet to materialize.

Why is the money being withheld? Should we expect that it will be released any time soon?

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you.

First of all, with regard to the Polar Environment Atmospheric Research Lab, that facility was established by a Conservative government in the early 1990s. It was mothballed by the Liberal government in 2001. We reopened it as a result of funding provided to university researchers in 2009, and their funding ran out this year. Environment Canada supported their application in a projects competition. We are prepared and we continue to be prepared to underwrite to a quarter of a million dollars the continued operation and the hosting of that facility. Unfortunately, the applicants were unsuccessful.

With regard to the \$35 million, yes, indeed, it was promised as a funding envelope in budget 2011. Those funds have been approved by Treasury Board and are on their way or have already arrived at the arm's-length agency, which will, again, through peer review of science applications, assign those funds to appropriate projects.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Woodworth, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister and officials, for your time today.

I'd like to pick up on one or two things Ms. Leslie was asking about. In particular, I want to make sure that I correctly understand the issue of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the sunseting of funds, because when I look at page 106 of the main estimates, it refers to "a decrease of \$10.2 million due to the sunseting of the Budget 2007 initiative to improve Canada's regulatory framework for major resource projects" and also "a decrease of \$1.1 million due to the sunseting of funding to

proactively lead Aboriginal consultations during environmental assessments".

The first thing I understand by the concept of sunseting is that these were special projects, funded for a time-limited period, and that project and that time-limited period is now complete. Is that correct?

Hon. Peter Kent: That's correct, and they will be in the budget. We have recommended their renewal and continuance. As Mr. Leboeuf said, there will be additional funds for first nations consultation.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: You've jumped ahead of me.

For the benefit of others on the committee and those who have asked questions about this, in point of fact, even though those programs have now been completed, new applications for further funding have been submitted and been recommended. Although we can't talk about what's in the budget, there is at least a possibility that funding may in fact be in the budget. So what appears as a decrease today won't actually be a decrease. Is that correct?

• (1705)

Hon. Peter Kent: That's absolutely right.

As I said, there were a number of sunseted funds in the previous fiscal year. There was great attention and there were suggestions of cuts regarding those worthy programs, but in fact, with my recommendation, the department's recommendation, and with the agency's recommendation with regard to CEAA, those funds were renewed.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Let's just say the reports of the death of those programs are somewhat premature, if it may be put that way.

By the way, I want to say also how proud and pleased I am that the Environment Canada main estimates show an increase of \$100 million, or 12%, which I think in an era of fiscal austerity shows that the government places a high priority on what your department is doing, Minister. I appreciate that.

I have one further question. I too have been reading about PEARL, the Polar Environment Atmospheric Research Laboratory. I understand that full-time, year-round, university-led research is going to be discontinuing at PEARL. I have the impression that Environment Canada will continue to conduct operations at the Eureka area. What is the status of Environment Canada activity in the high Arctic, given the discontinuance of the academic research?

Hon. Peter Kent: First, on the temporary—I hope—suspension of research activity at the PEARL station, it will not affect ozone monitoring or weather responsibilities of the Canadian Meteorological Service, which also has a station in Eureka. Some equipment used by that station—one of the Brewer ozone monitoring devices—was located at the PEARL facility because it was a good location and convenient for both ourselves and the research teams to use. For the moment, it will be relocated to the weather station and ozone monitoring, and weather obligations will continue to be met.

As you know, in the past two years we've made a commitment to expand and develop our weather services across the north, to deliver the same reliability of forecasting and warnings of extreme weather and maritime conditions as Canadians in the southern latitudes enjoy.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I understand there are also Arctic sites relating to wildlife and landscape research and monitoring. Could you or your officials mention something about that?

Hon. Peter Kent: I think I would refer to Dr. Dodds.

Dr. Karen Dodds (Assistant Deputy Minister, Science and Technology Branch, Department of the Environment): Thank you very much.

Yes, as the minister said, we continue to have the separate site at Eureka, a separate building looking at ozone and water and air quality. We have a number of other air quality sites across the north, about eight, and more than 40 sites for monitoring water. We have in the area of ten or more sites, I believe, where we do research and monitoring with regard to wildlife and habitat.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Very good. Thank you.

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time has expired.

We'll move now to Ms. Murray, for six minutes.

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

I appreciate your coming here to help us understand the plans for the Ministry of the Environment.

I understand that in the plans there is an intention to spend money to enhance "Canada's visibility as an international leader in clean energy technology". I'm interested to know what that means: how much money we're talking about; how it will be spent; whether it includes funding to promote oil sands products; and whether that money is to be spent here, in Canada, or spent elsewhere, outside of Canada.

• (1710)

Hon. Peter Kent: Let me start by saying that the international community does require assistance in being informed and enlightened with regard to Canada's resource practices and principles and, with regard to the oil sands, the responsibly regulated measures that this government takes with regard to exploiting a legitimate Canadian natural resource.

Certainly at every opportunity ministers of the government abroad work to deliver that message, that in fact there has been a misrepresentation—in many cases an exaggeration, and in certain cases deliberate falsehoods—with regard to the characterization of the exploitation of the resource industries.

With regard to specific dollar amounts, I think Deputy Boothe has them at hand.

Mr. Paul Boothe (Deputy Minister, Department of the Environment): Sure.

Thanks for the question. I think what you're referring to is the clean energy dialogue. The clean energy dialogue represents about \$1.8 million of a two-year allocation of \$5.4 million for renewed international climate change strategies.

In each year, Environment Canada will receive about \$900,000 for the clean energy dialogue. About \$448,000 of that will go to the science and technology group. They are co-chairs of the research and development working group, along with the U.S., and will contribute to projects undertaken by that group. An example of that would be research to improve productivity in harvesting methods in the use of algal biomass. The next generation of biofuels is one of those projects.

In addition to that, the international branch will receive about \$450,000 a year to fund our role as the secretariat for the clean energy dialogue. We're not the only department involved in this; NRCan is also involved in this.

Just to give you a sense of what work has been done to date... Sorry.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

I'm looking at \$90 million here, and I'm told that about \$2 million would be about Canada's international leadership in clean energy technology. I think the minister's response does imply that this is about selling the oil sands products. I'm wondering whether it also includes, in talking about "a platform to deepen engagement with the United States on climate change issues"... Is the government planning to continue lobbying to weaken the standards that are being considered in the United States, and that might disadvantage Canada, in the absence of any actual greenhouse gas reduction programs of our own, here in our country?

Hon. Peter Kent: No, absolutely not. We work with the United States on a number of levels. As you know, both of our countries, as signatories to Copenhagen, made commitments to reduce GHGs by 2020.

Because of our integrated economies, we have a very integrated plan. In transportation, which is an integrated manufacturing industrial sector, it made sense not to wrong-foot Canadian auto manufacturers, so we aligned our new regulations for emissions in cars, trucks, and heavy vehicles. With regard to coal-fired electricity, we're blessed with much more hydro power than the United States. Their sector is ten times bigger. They're using a different set of regulations, but we're both working to hit those same targets.

With regard to the major economies group, of which Canada and the United States are continuing members, we work to encourage our fellow parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to move ahead from the Kyoto era and work together to encourage more countries, the United States being a major—

• (1715)

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

The Chair: Unfortunately, time has expired.

Next we have Ms. Liu. You have five minutes.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Thanks a lot.

I'd like to welcome the minister to committee. It's the first time he has appeared before us, and I really appreciate that he has taken the time to meet with us.

I have a lot of questions, so I'd appreciate it if you'd keep your answers short. I realize you only have an hour to meet with us and there's a lot to get through.

I'd like to pick up on my colleague's concerns about funding allocated to the clean air agenda. We know there's an increase of \$90.3 million to this funding, and as my colleague mentioned, this funding will allow us to develop a "platform to deepen engagement with the United States on climate change issues and enhancing Canada's visibility as an international leader in clean energy technology".

It does sound as if this funding is being allocated to PR, and that's a concern that has been expressed by civil society as well.

At a time when we're cutting ozone research, laying off scientists at Environment Canada, and we're gutting funding to CEAA by 43%, can the minister explain to the committee why this is a wise allocation of funding?

Hon. Peter Kent: I think our earlier remarks clarified that we're not cutting funding to CEAA. Those were sunsetted funds. We are not reducing our commitment to ozone monitoring, or to science.

But as you know, in budget 2011 we are renewing funding for the clean air regulatory agenda, CARA, in the amount of \$600 million. This was a previously sunsetted program. It was a worthy program. It's an effective program that we pursue both in Canada and also with our international partners.

We will continue to work with regard to greenhouse gas commitments, but also, a month ago we started a parallel commitment to work on short-lived climate forcers with the United States, Mexico, Sweden, Ghana, Bangladesh, and the United Nations Environment Programme. These short-lived forcers, if we could contain and control them, reduce or eliminate them, would contribute 30% to annual global warming—

Ms. Laurin Liu: Thanks. I'd like to move on to my next question, if that's okay. My time is running out.

We've been talking about Eureka and PEARL, and we know they're two completely different things—two different locations, two different kinds of research.

My colleague did bring up the issue of PEARL. We do know that in the last budget the Minister of Finance announced \$35 million over five years for the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, to support excellence in climate atmospheric research in Canadian post-secondary education. These funds were delivered under the economic action plan.

The government did allow the funding to expire and the scientific research it supported to be lost. The \$35 million that was announced was supposed to replace that, but we haven't really seen that yet.

Can the minister clarify for committee where this climate change funding has gone?

Hon. Peter Kent: It is \$35 million. It will be dispersed by NSERC, which is an arm's-length agency. Neither I nor the

department determine how they make those awards. It's a five-year program, and that funding will be at the disposal of NSERC for the next five years.

As I said, there is a great deal of competition with various research projects proposed every year for natural science work. But again, in this particular area, with that \$35 million over five years, this will be at the discretion of NSERC.

Ms. Laurin Liu: My colleague also raised a lot of concerns about the PEARL. We know that the lab will be shutting its doors in a few days. This also means that investments previously made in PEARL—and these are investments paid for by Canadian taxpayers—are investments that are being lost as a result of this closure.

• (1720)

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time has expired. Thank you.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thanks.

My colleague Mr. Woodworth talked about the \$100-million increase requested by Environment Canada. One would hope that the opposition would support that.

I would like to focus, Minister, on the non-regulatory side of your department, which I don't think is talked about enough, given the successes that have occurred in the past and I hope will continue in the future. I'm talking about the stewardship programs Environment Canada is involved with. These programs typically involve close partnerships with NGOs, landowners, and people involved in agriculture, like many of my constituents. Actually, my constituents avail themselves of these programs as well as others that have an important role to play in managing landscapes.

Beyond protected areas, what stewardship measures and programs has the government implemented?

Hon. Peter Kent: Stewardship, along with more formally protected areas like the national parks and the national marine conservation areas, is an important part of this government's environment policy. It isn't always feasible in all habitats across Canada. Complementary efforts are critical to ensuring protection of the ecology and the environment in different situations. I think the best way to characterize stewardship programs is that they typically involve close partnerships with NGOs, non-governmental agencies, landowners, and others who have an important role in managing landscapes. The North American waterfowl management plan would be one, and the habitat stewardship program would be another important player.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Interestingly, the North American waterfowl management plan, which our government is a part of, can be considered the largest landscape conservation program in history, involving three countries. One group I would like to put kudos to is the waterfowl hunting community, which has been working away on this file for decades. I don't think the waterfowl hunters of Canada and North America get nearly enough credit for the work they do. That's why, during the last election campaign, I was so delighted that our government committed to a national hunting and wildlife advisory council. I think the hunting community will take its place in the sun as the strongest and best conservationists this country has ever had.

One program in particular I would like to ask about is Wildlife Habitat Canada, which is solely funded by waterfowl hunting licence fees. I trust this program will continue.

Hon. Peter Kent: Absolutely, yes.

Just to back up a little bit, I'd just like to thank you for your contribution to the creation of the national conservation plan. Landowners, hunters, and fisherfolk contribute significantly to the stewardship of the environment and to sustainable practices.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I agree: there's nothing like a person whose livelihood depends upon the environment to have them care about the environment.

You mentioned the national conservation plan, which was an election commitment of our government. Can you elaborate on where you might see this going?

Hon. Peter Kent: We have held initial consultations with a broad range of stakeholders. We will continue to engage groups across the country. With their engagement, advice, and support we will develop a conservation plan that will come before this committee, in the fullness of time, to be examined and worked on.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: We're very much looking forward to it. I will be recommending a strong focus on working landscapes in particular. As you know, Minister, my particular concern is the prairie wetlands and the important role they play. I'm looking forward to the development of that.

Do I have any more time, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

• (1725)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay, now I'm on the spot.

One thing that has been recommended to me in terms of helping to fund the waterfowl program is Wildlife Habitat Canada. I will throw out as a recommendation that we may want to look at increasing the waterfowl habitat stamp hunters have to buy, specifically non-

resident hunters. We could probably generate an extra \$1 million for conservation if something like that were implemented. I would be eager to help you with that particular initiative.

The Chair: Did you want to make a quick comment?

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you for your advice. That is an appropriate suggestion, and it's one we will follow up on.

The Chair: Minister and witnesses from the departments, thank you so much for being with us. We had you for almost a whole hour. Thank you so much.

Hon. Peter Kent: I apologize. The circumstances are not our creation. I would be glad to come back at any time that is appropriate for the committee. There is a great deal to talk about. I know that my officials are disappointed that they don't have the second hour alone with you.

[Translation]

Good day.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Colleagues, I'm going to ask you to turn to the document entitled "Parts I and II, The Government Expense Plan and Main Estimates" for 2012-13. We need to vote on this now.

We're going to deal with operating expenditures at this time.

ENVIRONMENT

Environment

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$713,595,000

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$50,225,000

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$120,202,000

Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency

Vote 15—Program expenditures.....\$15,248,000

National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy

Vote 20—Program expenditures.....\$4,811,000

Parks Canada Agency

Vote 25—Program expenditures.....\$484,965,000

Vote 30—Payments to the New Parks and Historic Sites Account.....\$500,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall the chair report votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30 under Environment to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, that is our business for today, colleagues.

The meeting is adjourned.

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