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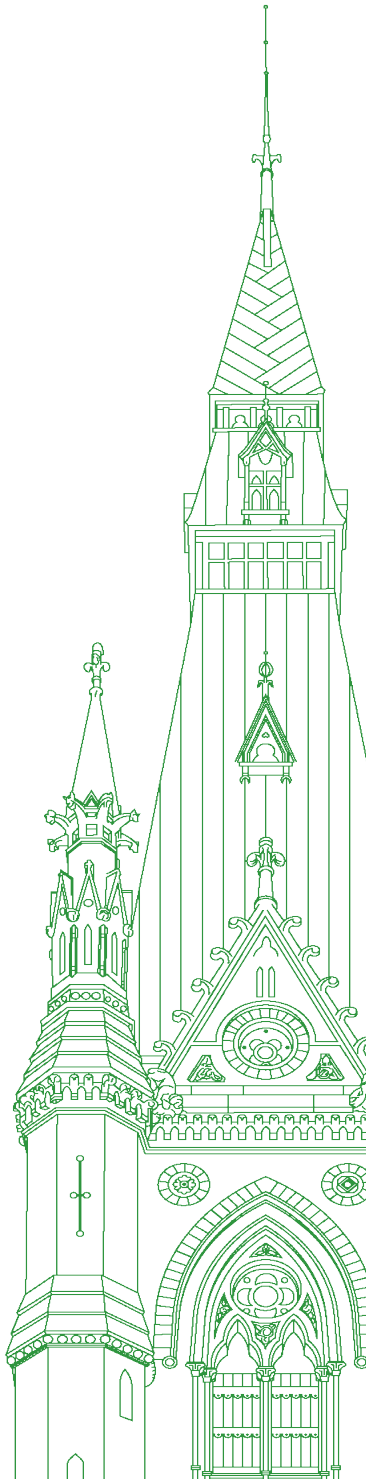

Chair: Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Monday, April 26, 2021

● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Welcome, members and witnesses, to meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, November 2, the committee is meeting on its study of single-use plastics.

For the benefit of the witnesses—because the members are quite familiar with this—the witnesses will have five minutes to present. When they're not speaking, they should put themselves on mute. After the presentations, we'll have multiple rounds of questions. If you could direct your comments and answers through the chair, that would be appreciated.

Today, from the City of Montréal, we have Maja Vodanovic, mayor of the borough of Lachine, but also a member, I believe, of the advisory committee of the zero plastics group. From Merlin Plastics, we have Tony Moucachen, president and chief executive officer. From the Retail Council of Canada, we have Mr. Philippe Cantin, senior director, sustainability innovation and circular economy.

I'll just go by the order here. We'll start with Ms. Vodanovic for five minutes, please.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic (Mayor of the Borough of Lachine, City of Montréal): Hello, everyone.

First of all, thank you for inviting me today. I'm honoured to be here. Actually, I'm thrilled to be able to talk about plastics. I'm a borough mayor, but I'm completely fascinated by the whole Canadian plastics industry.

I represent the greater Montreal area at National Zero Waste Council, where I co-chaired the plastics advisory panel with Andrew Marr, who is part of Metro Vancouver.

We created about 12 recommendations for different plastic wastes across Canada, which we identified as the most problematic ones. We created this document because we need to work better together. The federal, provincial and municipal governments need to collaborate. We need to create new federal, provincial and municipal legislation and bylaws that will allow us to implement these needed solutions.

This is why I'm so thrilled that you can hear me today, because we definitely need the federal government involved in order to solve these issues.

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Vodanovic. Could you just hold the mike up a little closer to you?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: Okay. I'm sorry.

We need to impose recycled content in packaging on the Canadian market. We need a packaging standard, and we need to define corresponding eco-fees. We need to ban certain products and expand deposit systems, and we must implement extended producer responsibility nationwide in a coherent and harmonized fashion.

In order to create a viable market for recycled content, for recycled plastics, the federal government must impose mandatory and incrementally increased recycled content in plastics on the Canadian market. This legislation must rapidly be put in place in order for Canada to reach its target of 50% recycled content by 2030. The European Union and California have already voted for these recycled content laws, and Montreal just joined the Canada Plastics Pact, which aims to impose 30% recycled content in Canadian packaging. It is the most important legislation that must be put in place as fast as possible. It alone can kick-start a circular economy in the plastic industry.

Why do we need to impose recycled content? It's because virgin plastics are inexpensive, thanks to oil and very cheap shale gas in Canada. Billons of dollars of investments from our governments, both federal and provincial, into the virgin plastic industry contribute to keeping those prices very low, and this makes it difficult, if not impossible, for recycled plastic, which gets 1,000 times less money, to be anywhere as competitive.

Of the various plastic objects we see around us, as I'm sure you already know, only 9% are recycled, and they're mostly downcycled, which means recycled into lower-quality resins. We need courageous legislation and equivalent funding from the federal government to bring post-consumer plastics back into the loop.

How do we bring them back into the loop? We need to influence the market, because in a market economy it is consumer decision that influences the industry, and the experience in other countries demonstrates that adding visible eco-fees on problematic, non-recyclable and single-use items is the most effective means of reducing those wastes.

I'm proud to say that our Canadian packaging industry, PAC, is currently working to define a national standard to rate packaging based on its recycled content and environmental impact, and I'm working with them on that. This standard will allow our government to set appropriate eco-fees that will encourage good packaging.

I would like you now to imagine if you could see an eco-fee on the label of a product. Let's take a water bottle, for example, and on its label, you see that 10 cents is added for an eco-fee because it is made exclusively from virgin plastic and it is for, let's say, type 5 plastic, which is very difficult to recycle in our country. Next to it, you see a product that has zero cents in eco-fees and is made with 30% recycled content and type 1 or 2 plastic, which is recycled in your community. Then you could ask yourself, do I pay 10 cents for this non-recyclable product, or do I not pay a fee because it is a good product? That would curb the market.

Producers already pay a recycling fee across Canada on all products, but that fee is not visible. It is combined in the total product cost and it does not reflect the true recyclability of the product—not enough, anyway, to make a real difference for the market. Labelling would enable the consumer to make an informed choice and shape the market in the needed direction. Knowing as a consumer that you are buying a certified good package is the best way for efficient EPR.

EPR makes producers responsible for their product to the very end of life, and producers are very important municipal partners, because when they become responsible for financing, managing and operating a full recycling system, they can contribute positively to the community, the environment and our economy. When the producers become financially responsible for the end of life of their product, they gain the incentive to design and operate systems most efficiently.

● (1535)

A few years ago, B.C. implemented a comprehensive EPR, the extended producer responsibility program. Now it has the highest recycling rates in Canada.

The Chair: I think we're a bit past the five-minute mark.

● (1540)

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: I'm sorry.

The Chair: It's all right; it's not the first time. Witnesses do this regularly, so don't feel bad.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: Okay.

The Chair: There will be time to get information in when you answer questions.

We'll go now to Mr. Moucachen for five minutes, please.

Mr. Tony Moucachen (President and Chief Executive Officer, Merlin Plastics): Thank you for inviting me to the committee.

The current federal approach is focused on introducing bans on some plastics. As a recycler, I know this approach fails to recognize the value of post-consumer plastics to industry and society.

Bans on plastic products suggest that the material is problematic, when in fact it is the absence of appropriate waste management systems that is the issue. Many plastics can already be recycled, but, as a society, we have not invested sufficiently in the system, infrastructure and technology required to maximize recycling opportunities.

Some plastics are considered harder to recycle than others, but there are solutions available or in pilot phase that can address our requirements. Canada needs to focus on supporting economic development opportunities to augment the technologies for mechanical recycling and create the space for chemical recycling technology to flourish.

The current federal government approach will not address the crux of the issue: namely, how we will deal with the end of life of packaging. Instead of introducing a ban, I would rather see the introduction of a disruptive fee levied against packaging that does not comply with required recyclability standards, such as design for recyclability guidelines. As a business person and innovator who built the largest plastics recycling company in Canada, I know we can do better if industry and governments co-operate and focus on solutions.

Rather than introducing bans—or what I could call a stick approach—I would urge the government to instead use a carrot approach and incentivize brand owners to design their packages for recyclability and incentivize them to use post-consumer resin in their packaging. We need to make brand owners accountable for the end-of-life design of their package through eco-fees, which Maja has clearly described and I greatly support.

I would also urge the government to encourage the development of further recycling infrastructure and investment in the building of such infrastructure.

The above would result in, one, improved product design for recyclability, which is the key element for future development; two, technological innovation in mechanical and chemical recycling; three, greater capacity to recycle; and four, more end markets for recycled content in the product.

This approach has three further benefits. It meets environmental sustainability goals, since plastics are often a more sustainable choice compared to alternative materials. It will demonstrate efficient use and reuse of extracted resources. It will catapult Canada into global leadership on this important issue.

Plastics have demonstrated, in many cases, their benefit. We see it through COVID-19 in having masks to prevent infecting other people. We see it in our clothes. We see it in our fridge in packaging milk, etc. There is good use for it, and it's not in any way, shape or form toxic; it actually helps us in our society, but we need good policy to make it circular, as Maja has described and I have mentioned.

That's all I have to say.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Cantin, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Philippe Cantin (Senior Director, Sustainability Innovation and Circular Economy, Retail Council of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to participate in the committee's work today.

● (1545)

[*English*]

Retail is Canada's largest private sector employer, with over 2.1 million Canadians working in our industry, and annually it generates over $76 billion in wages and employee benefits. The Retail Council of Canada is a non-profit, industry-funded association that represents more than 45,000 storefronts in all retail formats in every community across Canada, and we represent roughly 95% of the grocery market as well.

[*Translation*]

Overall, we support a national approach to banning certain single-use plastic items, as this will better mirror current supply chains and reduce complexity and red tape for businesses, which is very onerous at the moment, given the current patchwork of municipal and provincial by-laws.

Municipal bans create certain challenges [*Technical difficulties*] and fairness, when we think of e-commerce and online applications for meal delivery. The federal ban would allow clarity while ensuring more effective enforcement.

More clarity is still needed in definitions and in whether the government intends to expand the scope of the ban. Given the pandemic, it's important for businesses to have as much certainty as possible. Sufficient implementation time must be provided for businesses to deplete stockpiles and prevent materials from going to waste. It will also allow them to start sourcing suitable alternatives. This is particularly important to ensure larger companies do not have an unfair advantage over small and mid-size players on access to alternatives.

Furthermore, the government must more clearly support the development of infrastructure to manage recyclable plastics, bring up recycling rates and increase usage of recycled content in new packaging, as the two speakers who came before me mentioned.

[*English*]

Depending on the category of single-use plastics, the government should provide at least a one-year notice to allow businesses to adjust to the new requirements. For all items, there need to be very clear definitions of inclusions and exclusions by material and function.

Exemptions also need to be clearly defined, with considerations for accessibility, health, food safety, and security. We need to ensure that materials are available and have been assessed to ensure that their impact on the environment is lower than the materials that they'll be replacing. Language around a "viable alternative" needs to be clarified, as there are numerous considerations around what makes something viable and whether an item can be sourced at scale. Restrictions or bans should occur at all three levels throughout the supply chain: manufacturing, import and sale. This type of approach will help promote consistency when it comes to promoting alternatives.

Although we generally support the proposed ban, the RCC does not believe that the CEPA's schedule 1 is the right policy tool to manage plastics. The CEPA's schedule 1 is used to ban specific chemical substances and list them as toxic, not to designate a broad material category such as "plastic manufactured items". The broad wording could cause significant consumer confusion, and communication cannot be left open for interpretation when we talk about substances or items becoming toxic.

The proposed use of the CEPA's schedule 1 also, unfortunately, politicizes a chemicals management tool that is widely recognized as credible and well reasoned around the world, by both states and industry alike. A different policy tool, such as a pollution prevention plan, could be used in lieu of the CEPA's schedule 1.

[*Translation*]

When we think of a ban on single-use items and the need for clear definitions, checkout bags are often the first example that comes to mind. In defining checkout bags, it's important to specify that they refer to bags used to carry items out of a store or restaurant. Bags used in grocery stores for fruits and vegetables, meat or bulk items, for example, should not be included in the definition, as they must often be used for food safety reasons.

[*English*]

Many people also rely on straws for accessibility reasons, so there should be exemptions in the proposal to recognize the situation. Language also needs to be clear around whether packages of products such as straws or stir sticks, or products sold with a straw will be captured. The latter should not be, as that would have major supply chain impacts and product design impacts.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Cantin.

Mr. Philippe Cantin: Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: We will now go to questions.

Mr. Albas, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I am really excited to have such a wonderful B.C. company like Merlin here today, so this question is obviously for the gentleman from Merlin.

Certainly you recycle plastic goods to create new products, something that I think all here are happy to see. However, under the government's plan to declare all plastics as toxic and to regulate them under CEPA, your recycled goods that use recycled plastics would be considered toxic.

Do you think that is the right way to encourage a better circular economy?

● (1550)

Mr. Tony Moucachen: I definitely have difficulty, because I don't believe they are toxic. I do want a circular economy, but I also want to give the consumer, as my colleague said, the right information. I don't want to call it “toxic” just because I want to use it as recycling.

[*Translation*]

The end doesn't justify the means.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas: Well, the Liberals will say, oh, no, we are removing the “toxic” name from the schedule. However, as I said at this committee last week, the entire structure of CEPA is to regulate based on substances being toxic, and the word is used many times in the act. Therefore, I don't think changing one list will solve that.

Do you think using a law with criminal penalties, like CEPA, is better than working with industry and provinces to develop better recycling systems?

Mr. Tony Moucachen: I believe you should work with industry and co-operate with them, but I also believe in a stick-and-carrot policy. Those are the two fundamental things that we learn in Business 101. If there is no incentive like eco-fees....

As Maja mentioned, it could be an incentive. It doesn't have to be a stick, but there should be an implication and incentive to make sure that brand owners are moving towards recyclable products and designing their products to be in line with current recycling infrastructure. They should have an incentive to do so. With the lack of an incentive, they won't address it. We all have multiple problems running a business, and what are we going to look after? We're going to look after the ones that are immediate, the ones we need to deal with.

I believe we need a carrot-and-stick approach. Eco-fees are definitely one that is usable. Europe has used it. California has used it, where they give incentive for people who use post-consumer content or use their fees in collecting their package.

Voluntary things can work only for so long. If you want something that's going to work, it has to be regulated in some way, shape or form.

Mr. Dan Albas: Let's go back to incentives and other things that can be done at the provincial level, because we've heard at this committee that B.C. has much higher recycling rates. I do think that what the supply chains—you and your company and others like it—have done is a big part of that.

To just finish the thought when it comes to CEPA, would the bans and the “toxic” designation under CEPA hurt your business and the businesses you supply with recycled materials?

Mr. Tony Moucachen: Yes, I believe it could hurt the business. It could give the wrong message to the consumer that this product is hazardous, when we know in fact that it saves lives. When you look at masks for COVID-19, it does save lives. We see it in hospitals. To me, saying that plastics are hurting the environment or are toxic is the wrong message.

When I started the business 30 years ago, the big thing about the environment was clear-cutting. People were coming into British Columbia and taking the trees and turning them into paper. Plastics were an alternative, to stop cutting trees and deforestation.

To me, it's very important to have a circular economy. The question is how we do it. I don't believe the end justifies the means. I believe, philosophically, that this is not the right approach.

Mr. Dan Albas: On the right approach, what we've heard from other producers—or what we've heard from producers, period—is that this will chase away investment. They've said that already lots of investment has gone to the United States, and people are not willing to invest in Canada even though we make some virgin resin that is among the best in the world.

If there is less investment in your industry, would that make it harder for people like you to be able to grow a proper circular economy?

Mr. Tony Moucachen: I believe so. I believe it's like swimming in the ocean. If the tide is high, everybody's going to benefit. If the tide is low, everybody's going to suffer.

We complement each other, virgin resin and recycling content. It's a mosaic. The answer is hybrid. It's not one or the other; it's a combination. That's the way I see it.

Mr. Dan Albas: In British Columbia, we've had producer responsibility legislation in place for quite a while. Is that what you're talking about, working with industry to say what fees will be charged and to whom and that they will be rebated? This creates the infrastructure and the certainty for people like you to be able to take in more and to create that circular economy that many other provinces are talking about and becoming very alive to.

● (1555)

Mr. Tony Moucachen: This is definitely a good approach. Accountability is a good approach. When you want to get serious about anything you do, you start measuring it.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

We will hear from Mr. Saini, for six minutes, please.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all the witnesses. I'm very happy to have all of you here on this Monday afternoon.

Monsieur Cantin, I want to start with you first. I've been reading some of the stuff that your organization has written and something that your executive director has stated publicly. I also noted the comments that you made in your initial remarks. As you're aware, the current recycling system in Canada is a patchwork that varies from province to province, and even from municipality to municipality. An item that is recyclable in one place may not be considered recyclable just one town over.

Do you believe that harmonized federal action on plastics would create better regulatory certainty for businesses than the current patchwork of regulations across hundreds of municipalities?

Mr. Philippe Cantin: Definitely. I think the extended producer responsibility, as Maja mentioned earlier, is also one of the key components to success in a federal approach to that. Recognizing that there are provincial areas of jurisdiction, it's really important to make sure that the federal government doesn't get into the provincial responsibilities and that this is an effective, harmonized approach. Building on standards around extended producer responsibility and recycled content might actually help harmonize the systems across Canada, as opposed to getting into something that's a bit more hands-on.

Mr. Raj Saini: Just so I can understand this, are you suggesting that harmonization would help municipalities and also, according to your organization, provide certainty for businesses?

Mr. Philippe Cantin: That's correct.

Mr. Raj Saini: Ms. Vodanovic, I know you're a municipal leader also. Do you agree with those comments, that harmonization would help?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: Absolutely. I went to many different conferences and I heard Canadian Tire and Loblaws saying that it's a nightmare. There are different regulations in Quebec that we have to comply with for all our products on the shelves. It's different in Ontario and it's different in Vancouver. They have people doing that full time.

If we had a harmonized system across each province, the market would also be bigger. It would be easier for them and we could create more of a market for the recycled plastics that we produce.

Mr. Raj Saini: The second question I have for Mr. Cantin is the following. While we know banning single-use plastics is a move in the right direction, it won't solve all of our plastic pollution troubles overnight. To date, the majority of recyclable plastics that would not be included in this ban still aren't recycled and end up in landfills and in the environment. What advice would you give to get the rest of the plastics out of the landfills and into a circular system?

Mr. Philippe Cantin: We need to kick-start a circular economy by making sure there's a really good basis for the material that we collect for recycling.

Recycle content standards—incremental standards to ensure the market has the capacity to absorb changes over time—would be the key for that. At this point, we're looking at a system in which we send stuff to recycling but we're not really in a position to reuse that material and close the loop on packaging. That would be a way to connect the output with the new input and to really close the loop on a circular economy.

Mr. Raj Saini: This question is for Mr. Moucachen.

Oftentimes when plastics are recycled, they're recycled into plastics of lesser value that can't be recycled again. For example, recyclable bottles might be recycled into plastic bags or clothing fabric. How do we ensure that recycled plastics are recycled not just once but continually so there's a circular loop?

● (1600)

Mr. Tony Moucachen: We do that by designing the package itself, such as, for example, a clear bottle that has a label and printing that is soluble and caustic and that dissolves. Properly designing the package would allow you right from the get-go to recirculate and recycle it and turn it into the same package. One of the challenges we face is that if, for example, a package has a lot of printing and a lot of colour, we cannot turn a multicoloured product back into a clear form, so those are some of the issues that we consider.

In terms of environmental benefit, the way I see it is that regardless of the application we sell to, we are displacing a non-renewable resource—virgin resin. If we're sending our product into a bottle or if we're sending it back into a pipe...by sending it into a pipe versus into a bottle, we're displacing one pound of virgin resin of a non-renewable resource. The environmental benefit and the reduction of carbon is still the same. I can see that philosophically it's better to see it over and over again multiple times instead of going from a consumable good to a durable good, but even if we go to a durable good, we're still displacing a pound of non-renewable resource.

Mr. Raj Saini: The government has a proposal for recycled-content standards. What's your opinion on that?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Please provide a very quick answer.

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Moucachen: I think it's excellent. We need a sustainable market. As Maja mentioned, we have to maintain our service to our community, and we cannot compete with commodities.

Mr. Raj Saini: Thank you very much, sir.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Chair, before I begin, I would like a clarification.

Less than one hour before the meeting began, we learned that Marc Olivier was to attend. However, he isn't here. Have we heard from him?

The Chair: I will ask the clerk to answer you.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Angela Crandall): The IT staff have spoken with him. He will join us soon. It's not a technical issue; Mr. Olivier has simply not yet joined the meeting.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, can you send me an email when he joins the meeting?

The Clerk: Of course.

The Chair: We will try to give him five minutes for his presentation.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here.

My first question is for Madam Mayor.

You represent the Montreal Metropolitan Community on the National Zero Waste Council.

Do you consider the measure to ban the six single-use plastic items to be an adequate response to the problem cities are currently facing?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: Thank you for your question, Ms. Pauzé.

No, absolutely not. We need to go much further. It's a drop in the bucket. The thousands of containers in grocery stores are also single-use containers. Forks and spoons come to mind, of course, but juice and shampoo bottles are also only used for a few weeks before being thrown away. You really have to look at everything that is being produced.

Yes, we need to go much further. Recycled content is one measure that will get us there.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you very much.

My second question is for Mr. Cantin.

On your website, in the extended producer responsibility section, there appears to be a report indicating what is being done in Europe or elsewhere in North America. When you click on the link to download the report, “404 error” comes up. I don't know what's going on. I tried to download it on more than one computer.

Because Europe is decades ahead of us in recycling plastics, it would be helpful to get that report. Could you possibly send it to us?

● (1605)

Mr. Philippe Cantin: Are you talking about our website?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Yes. There's a link to the report on extended producer responsibility. It says you can download the report, but the link doesn't work. You get the “404 error” message.

Mr. Philippe Cantin: I will try to send the report to the committee members.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you.

I'd like to ask you a question. You said earlier that the six items were not toxic. However, in her appearance before the committee, Ms. Curran, a lawyer and environmental law professor, defined the three markers of toxicity: immediate or long-term effects on the environment, an environmental hazard, and a health hazard.

Why does the industry use arguments such as how we interpret the word “toxic”? It seems clear to me that these six items meet all three criteria for toxicity.

Mr. Philippe Cantin: I think we agree that these six items are toxic. The problem is that we're talking about manufactured plastic items, and that category includes many more items than these six that people are suggesting be banned.

On these six items, I agree with you. Based on the criteria used, they could be considered toxic.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Okay.

You work in the innovation and sustainability sector. Don't you think it's time the government reduced subsidies to the petrochemical industry so that investments can be made in the recycling and recycled product system?

Mr. Philippe Cantin: I can't comment on how the government manages the budget.

I can say, however, that we certainly need more support and incentives for a green economy. We need it to create more packaging in line with the circular economy principle.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: That's right. As I understand it, to set up the circular economy, you have to include processes that are not "petroleum-based".

My next question is for Mr. Moucachen.

Mr. Moucachen, first, I would like to commend you for your circular economy initiatives. You have entered into a partnership with NOVA Chemicals, which produces virgin resin. Last week, we had a representative from Dow Chemical. It was strange, because that company is not nearly as open as NOVA Chemicals in that respect.

Can you explain how Merlin Plastics managed to create this partnership with NOVA Chemicals?

Mr. Tony Moucachen: Customers are driving these changes.

Today, NOVA Chemicals customers want products that contain a percentage of post-consumer recycled material. NOVA Chemicals wants to partner with companies that can help it thrive.

Things have clearly changed. Before, you had to choose between virgin resin and recycled resin. Now, we marry the two. You need both, and NOVA Chemicals understands that.

Dow Chemical once understood that too. When I started out in the industry 30 years ago, I partnered with Dow Chemical. We supplied those materials to Dow Chemical. Its major customers wanted postconsumer recycled materials. That was in the 1980s.

In the 1990s, the Iraq war broke out, and the price of oil dropped to $10 or $11 a barrel. Brand owners no longer wanted to buy recycled materials, because they were more expensive than raw materials.

The Chair: Thank you.

Apparently Mr. Olivier is with us. Has he arrived, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes.

Mr. Marc Olivier (Research Professor, Université de Sherbrooke, As an Individual): I'm here. I had trouble connecting to you.

The Chair: Okay.

You can give your five-minute presentation.

Mr. Bachrach will then have the floor for six minutes to ask questions.

Mr. Olivier, you have the floor.

● (1610)

Mr. Marc Olivier: My thanks to all the committee members.

We have a very special interest. When I say "we", I am talking about the applied research group of which I am a member, the Technology Transfer Centre for Industrial Ecology.

The Chair: Mr. Olivier, do you have headset?

Mr. Marc Olivier: No, I'm in a broadcasting studio that we use for distance learning at the university.

Can you hear me well enough?

The Chair: Madam Clerk, is the sound quality good enough for the interpreters?

The Clerk: The interpreters are telling me that they will be able to provide the interpretation.

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Mr. Olivier.

Mr. Marc Olivier: Thank you very much.

Can you see that I tried to obey all the rules? I even put on a jacket and tie so that I could attend this meeting.

The Chair: The interpreters are grateful that you are wearing a tie.

Mr. Marc Olivier: Our angle of attack is a little different from what the other participants are describing or what I'm reading.

Our organization is an applied research centre. We work together with companies on the end of life of materials. However, we don't work directly with consumers; we take no position on how things work in society at large. We look at the materials that come to us or don't come to us. We ask ourselves what we could do to consistently extend their life cycle. I just wanted to start with that clarification.

We receive materials from factories. We receive some from sorting centres. These are household items that have gone through a sorting centre. Of course, we're also asked to join circular economy movements and implement industrial synergies to try to collect as many materials as possible in a given area. It's always about extending life cycles.

There was a meeting again last week. It's becoming clear that everyone wants to do the right thing. We fully agree that a ban is necessary, but it is not enough. Other factors are important to us, especially those related to single-use items. Just plain common sense drives us to try to create something coherent when the materials come to us.

In the short text I submitted, we talk about our vision, which we present in three points. The first point is about not designing single-use plastic items that do not match our recovery and recycling efforts. Only items that can be reused contribute to a sustainable development approach.

The second point says that, if we absolutely must use single-use items in certain situations, then we must choose materials that have a low carbon footprint, but more importantly, that are easy to recover and recycle. Here, I can see that our position goes against that of other participants. According to them, recovery and recycling are smoke and mirrors and they will never matter; what we need to do is ban, ban, ban.

And yet, we have real needs in our society. That's why we developed our third and final point, which we feel is important with respect to single use. The third point states that, if a single-use item absolutely must be made of plastic, buying and distributing it must be conditional on an orderly recovery and recycling plan.

We can establish accreditation bodies that will have organizational and financial responsibility for establishing forms of recovery and reclamation. We know of accreditation bodies that have been set up. Quebec already has five of them up and running and others are in development.

It's truly groundbreaking to claim that we want to address the issue of single-use items. Now, because I can't set aside part of my role as a university professor, I have to tell you, committee members, even if you already know, that we have a special situation. We have an elephant in the room right now, an elephant you refuse to talk about. It's these disposable masks.

Is that not the perfect example of a single-use item for which absolutely nothing has been planned, in terms of recovery and reclamation? They are everywhere now and they're spreading. Let me tell you, I'm under a lot of pressure from students in the academic community right now. They're asking why no mass recovery is being done.

People tell us that they were involved in massive movements before the pandemic to let governments know that they wanted to change how we relate to the environment. Is the best example we can set right now for all those students the shameless waste of tens of billions of disposable masks?

● (1615)

The Chair: We are going to have to stop here. It will be possible to come back to this during the first round of questions.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses. We've heard so much interesting and provocative testimony on this subject over the past few meetings.

Mayor Vodanovic, I have some questions about the municipal role. I'm wondering if you could speak to the way in which a federal ban on single-use plastics would support municipal waste management strategies and operations.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: On a municipal level, we're kind of stuck. We're stuck running recycling plants that at the end can't sell their things. In terms of looking at how to solve municipal issues, well, I'm always looking at the federal government. That's why I'm so happy to be here.

If we do it in just a small way, such as just in my borough, or just in Montreal—we banned plastic bags, and I was on that commission—it's not the most efficient thing. Yes, you can ban things. It's okay, but the best thing is to put a price tag on it. For instance, in Ireland it's a dollar per bag. They stopped using bags, or 90% of them. It's something that a municipality can't do. Only the federal government can act on that.

We need to look across the country on how to work in a system. We want to create a circular system. We don't want to ban certain things, because it won't be effective.

● (1620)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you for that response. I think I heard at the outset that you were supportive of the federal government's proposed approach to banning certain items. I'm hearing a bit of a different message now. Can you elaborate on the place that you see for bans specifically?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: I agree with the ban—I feel funny being here today talking about what I say in private—but when you talk about banning straws, that's great, but it is so little. It is so little. We have so much more to do. Canada is a producer of oil. We are chemical experts. We can do this. We can be the forerunners in this circular economy based on plastics.

Just banning straws is not enough. We can do so much more.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I understand that the list of six product types proposed for banning is based on a number of criteria. My question is whether, using those same criteria, the federal government should capture a wider range of products. Are there other products that you would like to see included in that list?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: What I really would like the government to do is impose a recycling percentage. I think a 30% recycling content imposed on all packaging in Canada would create a much, much bigger shift in our economy than just banning.

Yes to banning the toxic plastics around number three. Number five is not that great, and some number sevens. We should ban those and just do the plastics that are not toxic. We should go beyond just bans, definitely. I mean, if we want to be ambitious like the ocean charter that the government has embarked on, we have to be ambitious in other areas as well.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you.

Living in British Columbia, I'm quite familiar with the EPR system here. The small community I live in has curbside pickup. We had it for a few years and then we lost it. We just got it back, which is very exciting, but I know it's a voluntary system. Many people don't avail themselves of the recycling option that is provided.

Is EPR sufficient to get us to where we need to be in terms of recovery rates in the recycling system?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: I think we need EPR, but we also need, combined with EPR, the deposit system where people get money back. That is huge. You get good-quality plastics and you get lots of it.

I was in your place for different commissions for Montreal, and usually the industry is against it. The producers say, "No, no, no, the deposit system is no good. Just put it in recycling," but I think, as does the whole zero waste council, it should be a combination of curbside and the deposit system, which is very, very good. If you have a price tag on it, or if you buy something that you know is....

Anyway, I won't go into that. Eco-fees is too much of an issue. I hope we have a nationwide EPR system that is at least as good as B.C.'s or better. Let's not downscale ourselves.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Picking up on where you left off with regard to eco-fees, and looking at the six product types that are being proposed for the federal ban, is it practical to apply eco-fees to things like straws, six-pack rings, and those kinds of products? They seem to be falling through the cracks of our current recycling approach.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: You can easily ban certain things, no problem. There are certain things you don't need. If you go to a restaurant, and you have takeout, you have all these things. If you know you're paying 20¢, 30¢, or 40¢ for that, you will change, and you won't do it. You will bring your plate. You will bring your bag if you're paying 50¢ for a bag, when they give it to you. You will change. That has been proven around the world. Paying fees curbs consumer attitude.

● (1625)

The Chair: We'll go to our second round, which is a five-minute round.

We'll begin with Mrs. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, and thanks to all the witnesses.

Mr. Olivier, I'm glad you could join us, because you said something that also sparked my concern, and that's the issue concerning masks.

What do you see ultimately happening with these masks? Can you speak further about that? Have you thought this particular issue through?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Olivier: Yes, of course.

We tried to start in a place that would be sensitive to action. We found that sensitivity in a university. Actually, it's two institutions: the Université de Sherbrooke and the Centre hospitalier universitaire de Sherbrooke. In them, we succeeded in establishing a form of mask recovery because of the pressure from student and other groups. We have some very active environmental groups in the institutions.

So, since November, we have been systematically using specially marked containers to recover standard-issue masks, because people can wear them only for half a day before having to replace them. We have already filled one container to the brim. We have a working agreement with a processing plant in the region. We want the project to take the form of a circular economy in which plants in the University area, in Estrie, the Eastern Townships, can participate. So we have come up with the idea of making a new bio-based material with the masks.

An average mask contains 2.47 g of polypropylene. You get almost 2.5 g of polypropylene just by cutting out the rectangle. So you recover the masks, you simply take off the elastic and you get very good quality polypropylene that is completely recyclable. It's no problem at all, except that you have to set up a way to recover and store the masks and then transport them to a factory where you can make the bio-based material by mixing in recycled wood fibre with the polypropylene. That gives a bio-based composite of polypropylene reinforced with wood fibre.

The bio-based material can be used in one of three ways. We can use it directly to make construction panels, 4 x 8 panels, for example, or wall panels. You can also mould it to make various objects because the material behaves like plastic, except that it is much stronger because of the high content of shredded fibre. That's the first possibility.

The second possibility is depolymerization. A company in Estrie called Enerkem takes all kinds of organic and carbon-based materials and depolymerizes them. This means that it breaks down polymers into the small constituent molecules. They then produce syngas, a mixture of carbon monoxide and hydrogen, which they then synthesize into all kinds of other molecules. Currently, it is synthesizing ethanol from any kind of organic material that it has depolymerized in this way.

The final possibility is to use it as an alternative carbon-neutral fuel. Given that it is a bio-based material made up of two thirds of organic matter and one third of fossil-based polypropylene, the bio-based material as a whole is classified as one that has a role in sustainable development. It can be used as a alternative, carbon-neutral fuel. To me, burning it is not the best thing to do; recycling it is better. However, it can be burned to drive a small generator in a plant, for example, producing electricity in a closed circuit, because it is completely carbon neutral.

So you can see that it has significant financial advantages. Whatever a company does with this bio-based material, it can put itself in a particularly advantageous position in terms of carbon credits and anything else that will come along in the future.

● (1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Baker, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thanks very much, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses who are here today. I have questions for all of you, and I won't have time to get to all of you.

Mr. Moucachen, my colleague Mr. Saini was asking you a question at the end of his time, and I think you got cut off in answering him. I wanted to follow up to see if you had anything else to say on it. He was asking you how you viewed the government's proposal to introduce recycled content standards.

Do you have anything else you wanted to add to that? You got cut off, and I wanted to make sure you had a chance to fully answer that.

Mr. Tony Moucachen: It's a great approach. We know that market demand is going to create and everything else is going to follow. I believe the post-consumer content is going to be good, but equally important, it's going to go back to the design of the package. The package has to be designed so that it can be taken back and reformulated over and over again. It may cost more money to make the product originally if you want to reuse it over and over again than if you just use it.... You extend it to a durable application.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Yes, that makes a lot of sense. Thank you for that. I'm going to move on to Mayor Vodanovic.

Mayor Vodanovic, I think it was in response to a question from Mr. Bachrach that you said you have products in your waste disposal or your recycling system that you can't sell off. I think that's what I heard you say. If that's correct, why can't you sell them?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: Okay. Quickly, plastics don't like to be mixed. There are about seven types.

Types one and two are very popular. We can separate them and we can sell them, but for types three, four, five and six—soft plastics—all of that is mumble-jumble. It's stuck together. It has no value because we cannot sort it out. It's too labour-consuming. When I go to the store I can't even look at food anymore, because all I see is number four, number three, and "why are you doing number five?" It's all going to get mixed up.

Canada is not heading towards better recycling. We're heading in a different direction. There are more and more plastics on the shelves that are combined and that cannot be recycled. They're multi-layered multi-plastics, all put together, that cannot be recycled. If on the shelves we have plastics that are recyclable, then I can sell the stuff, but now, I can sell only types one and two, and for all the rest, even for the people who really want to do something, it's really hard for types three, four, five, six and seven.

Mr. Yvan Baker: What's your recommendation, then? Is it your recommendation that we ban the use of certain types of plastics? What's your solution to that particular problem?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: I think we need to ban certain plastics that are very hard to recycle, like number five and maybe number three. I'm not an expert, but we should take a better look at this. For number seven, where everything is combined with aluminum, it's very difficult. We should stick to number ones and number twos, and we should.... I don't know. I forget the question. This is such a complex issue in two minutes. We should have a system that would allow us to recuperate it and put it back on the market. Right now, there are too many elements that are not right in the system, and it's not true that it gets recycled.

We have to look at the problem. I want to say that it's very good that we're banning certain things. It's a good start, but we need to do so much more.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I think I have about a minute left. Mayor Vodanovic, just quickly, if you can, you talked about putting a price on things and the importance of doing that. I think you mentioned a levy or some sort of deposit or additional fee, whatever you want to call it, in terms of incenting behaviour or asking people to change their behaviour.

I think a great example of that is a price on pollution, like what Canada is trying to do in terms of putting a price on pollution to get us to reduce our emissions. Would you agree that it's a good example of that, an effective example of that?

● (1635)

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: Yes, it's a good example of that, and the strange thing is that we already pay for that. There's a tax on everything you buy that helps the producers recycle it. You actually pay for the recycling, so how about you pay more for something that is really not recyclable and you pay less for something that can go into Merlin's machine there and can be done?

We need to set the standard, because right now in Canada, we don't know what's a good package and what's a bad package. You have no idea what you're buying.

The Chair: That's interesting.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: Let's first of all know what we're buying. People are making the standards, but we need the government. All the industries are going, "We want the federal government to help us." The municipalities need you too. We need to continue this conversation.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Pauzé, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: My questions are for Mr. Olivier.

Mr. Olivier, after everything you have told us about masks, I have to admit that I'm wondering whether I shouldn't be helping you to collect them.

Seriously, do you, as an expert in plastics, consider that the science of bioplastics is progressing at a promising speed?

Are we unnecessarily slow in building recycling and upgrading facilities? In other words, do we have the technology we need to create a genuine circular economy? Are we not delaying it for reasons that are neither technological nor organizational?

Mr. Marc Olivier: The word bioplastics causes a lot of confusion. Because the word starts with the prefix “bio”, people believe that bioplastics are biodegradable. That is not the case at all.

We can manufacture any kind of permanent plastic, like the plastics we all know, using existing biomass material instead of fossil material. Some major projects like Coca-Cola and so on are suggesting that, in five or 10 years, all the stacks of plastic bottles they used to sell bottled drinks will be made from “bio” sources. That is not impossible, because those plastics can be blended with plastics from another source to make them recyclable.

The problem is when people send materials that are “biofragmentable”, biodegradable, for recycling, which is total nonsense. It costs more to manufacture materials that do not even last. We don't want to operate like that. When we manufacture plastics, we absolutely have to make sure that they contribute to sustainable development, that they are recycled and made into something new.

Currently, using the word “bioplastic” causes a huge amount of confusion, with students and with the general public alike.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Exactly.

In fact, the plastics industry places a lot of emphasis on the strength, the quality and the reliability of its virgin plastic. Other kinds are recycled, compostable, “bio”. I am certainly confused.

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time is up, but you will have the opportunity to finish your comments when you are answering another committee member.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Chair, I would like to make a quick comment. The witnesses have so many interesting things to teach us, that I would appreciate them sending any additional information they may have to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Picking up where I left off with Mayor Vodanovic, I'm wondering how familiar you are with the B.C. EPR system and whether the products.... That's not my question—I understand you're very familiar—but I have a specific question about whether the products that are currently being considered for banning are being recycled in that EPR system.

Are they being captured or are there characteristics that make it very difficult for an EPR system to capture those specific product types?

● (1640)

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: I think it's very difficult to capture straws and plastic.... There are certain things that are just not...especially take-out containers. I mean, you throw them out; you don't take them home with you. At least if they were made out of recycled content and used first.... I don't want to get into it, but I'm sure that many things end in the garbage.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: My understanding is one of the constraints with food containers is contamination. We're not allowed to put food containers that have food residue in the recycling stream. Is that one of the constraints?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: The more plastic is dirtied—and I'm sure Tony would know better—the harder it is to recycle. The purer something is, the easier it is to recycle. If it's soiled, it's a problem.

I know our recycling system more than the B.C. one, but I was very happy to go to B.C. and to discover how good it is.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: You mentioned earlier that one of the challenges is the inexpensive nature of virgin resin in creating plastic products. I believe you alluded to the fact that we subsidize the fossil fuel industry very heavily in Canada.

How do you see this being addressed by the federal government, and how important is that in reaching the circular economy?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: It takes a lot of courage, I think, but it's billions of dollars, and I know the provincial government also gives billions of dollars, not just in direct subsidies to the oil industry but also to build new factories for virgin plastic products. A recent one was built in Alberta, and in the United States too there are many plastics factories that are being built with shale gas, so it's very cheap right now.

In order to combat this, that's why we need to put in that it's an obligation to put in recycled content, because otherwise nobody will do it. Nobody is crazy enough to buy something that's four times more expensive, but we need to do it for the environment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Redekopp, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Cantin, about two years ago your organization released a statement praising the new safe food for Canadians regulations coming into force. I read in there that you said the CFIA also met with national organizations, including your organization, to ensure all considerations with respect to the regulations were addressed. The statement said, “We wanted to make sure that, from retailers’ point of view, the regulations made sense and that there was flexibility built in to them in order for retailers across the country to realistically and efficiently comply with all requirements.”

I asked Environment Canada a few weeks ago if they had consulted with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the CFIA, and they were very hesitant to answer or elaborate.

Was your organization consulted regarding the plastics ban? If so, were you satisfied that the government listened to you?

Mr. Philippe Cantin: We were consulted, yes. I think we had multiple meetings on that, so we can say we were consulted. The interaction with CFIA's food safety standards requirements is important to take into consideration, because sometimes requirements introduced by the government might hinder some of Environment Canada's approach on certain items. You have to make sure Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and CFIA have as many conversations as Environment Canada does with certain stakeholders, because clearly there are interactions between the two jurisdictions.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Are you satisfied that, when these regulations come into effect on January 1, your members can guarantee the effectiveness of food safety in their retail locations?

Mr. Philippe Cantin: Since I'm the sustainability person, I can't say I'm as well versed on food safety as some of my colleagues would be, so I couldn't answer your question in terms of whether our members welcome the food safety requirements, but I know this has been part of the discussions we've had in the last couple of years, and they've adapted to the new reality.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Maybe there's a different way to ask that question. You earlier testified that you would like to see a one-year notice to allow your members time to do things like use up existing inventory and properly plan for this implementation. Do you feel like you've had enough time and consultation to accomplish all those things that need to get done?

● (1645)

Mr. Philippe Cantin: Are you referring to the CFIA requirements?

Mr. Brad Redekopp: No, just to the plastics ban that's going to be coming in here in January.

Mr. Philippe Cantin: If there is an implementation period of one full year between the moment the ban is announced and it's effective, then yes, that would be essentially what we're asking. I think we're reiterating that to make sure the message is heard, especially for smaller businesses that tend to buy in bulk for a full year. You don't want to be in a situation where you hurt smaller businesses because they've stocked more than they needed on certain materials because they want to have access to the best price possible. You don't want to be in a situation where you're hurting smaller businesses more than others. That's the reason we're looking for a full-year implementation timeline.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: As you said before, they may end up just throwing extra materials into the waste anyway if they can't use them anymore.

We've also heard today that this initial ban that's being spoken about is just the beginning and there's ongoing discussion about declaring many more forms of plastic as toxic. As we move down that road to banning more things, there has to be cost implications.

From your perspective of this current plastics ban that's being looked at, what cost is that going to add to consumers at the grocery store? Have your members spoken about the cost implications of not being able to use these types of straws versus another type of straw? Have there been any studies or economic analyses done of this that can be shared with us?

Mr. Philippe Cantin: We haven't had studies per se on that. We've asked members to look at what the price differences were, but the market has been adapting quite quickly. There are lots of new materials that are alternatives to plastic that have been introduced on the market. As a result, the prices for them have changed as well.

It's hard to pinpoint what the cost implications would be at this point for replacing those single-use items with new ones. Again, the market is evolving really quickly. You can notice that a lot of businesses have adopted cardboard-based and fibre-based containers to replace styrofoam, for instance, in the past couple of years. As a result, those items are not necessarily as expensive as they used to be. They're still more expensive than styrofoam-based containers; I just couldn't tell you how much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Ms. Saks for five minutes.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of our witnesses today.

I agree with Madame Pauzé. We're learning so much in this discussion today, and it's extremely valuable.

In a previous session, I noted that we're recycling about 256,000 tonnes of plastic a year, but we're producing about 20 times that in virgin resin at the moment. There's a cost to that. We've talked a lot about costs to produce and so on, but there's an environmental cost to all of this.

I'd like to ask whether the environmental cost of virgin resins compared to recycled resins is reflected in the market today. Should that full cost be reflected for those materials so that consumers can make informed choices, and so that the secondary market for recycled material is balancing out?

Either Madam Vodanovic or Mr. Moucachen can start.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: I'll answer. Of course, that is exactly the objective, because the environmental cost of global warming is, we know, in the billions of billions of dollars.

The bottle that is made purely of recycled resin should, in the end, cost more to the consumer than one that is made partially from recycled material, because I know it's very hard to do it completely for now. At least it is a part—as Mr. Moucachen says, a marriage of the two.

Mr. Tony Moucachen: There have been many studies that show that each tonne of recycled resin reduces the carbon footprint by 1.5 tonnes. There are some that have been done by the federal government. Those studies exist today.

In regard to the resin, there's one thing I would like to mention. We recycle polypropylene two, and not only one and two. We also recycle four and five, and there are some markets for those that are quite good right now.

It's a fluid environment, though. We're competing against commodities that are very fluid. It's feast or famine, and our communities are looking for recycling today and tomorrow, regardless of whether oil is selling at $150 a tonne or at $20 a tonne. They don't want their package to be in our natural environment. They want their product to be out of there, recycled and dealt with. That's the challenge we're facing.

● (1650)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: That leads me to my next question, which would be for you. Would a recycled content standard and an extended producer responsibility expand the market for recycled plastics and create jobs in the recycling industry?

Mr. Tony Moucachen: I firmly believe that it does both. There's an environmental benefit, and it has a social and economic benefit too, for the community.

The environmental benefit has been studied in terms of reducing 1.5 tonnes of carbon for each tonne of recycled product you're making, versus incinerating it or landfilling it.

In terms of jobs, the product still needs to be sorted and recycled, so it's basically community jobs that are going to be created.

In regard to the recycling rate, it's a bit misleading, because a lot of products we make in Canada in virgin resin are exported. When you look at what we have produced versus what we recycle, I don't know if you could use it, because some of the products we make in virgin resin are exported all over the world.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: That still has a global impact, which we are a part of.

Maja Vodanovic, like you, when I go to the grocery store, I have tremendous anxiety when shopping. There are places in the world, like in Germany, where they have grocery stores where you come in with your containers. We're not there yet in Canada.

It's a lot of pressure on the consumer. How are we supposed to expect 38 million consumers to be perfect in their recycling, when they don't have the information they need right now? There's a lot of pressure on the consumer end to fix this problem. Would it be better for industry to be responsible for ensuring the recyclability, collection and recycling of their products? Professor Olivier talked about that in relation to masks.

Should we have bins, or is there a way that producers should be collecting? We've seen protests where folks leave all their plastic packaging at a grocery store.

I'd like some comments from either of you on that perspective.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: Extended producer responsibility is exactly that. The producers who make the brand names and the product have to take care of it all the way until the end. The onus is on them. It's not on the consumer. Do you understand?

I wish I could have more time because it is such a complex issue. Let's say the consumer has five shampoo bottles, and he sees the eco-fees on the five. If one of the shampoo bottles costs 40¢ because it's impossible to recycle, that's your environmental fee. One is zero cents because it's made out of recycled resin and it's reusable. Then you will choose that as a consumer. You will not have that anxiety.

That's where I would like us to go. Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go to the third round, which will be kicked off by Mr. Jeneroux.

You have five minutes, please.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for joining us this afternoon. It's afternoon in Edmonton, where I am.

We know most witnesses who have already appeared before our committee have agreed that reducing plastic waste is vital. That being said, we've also heard about the inevitable negative impacts on Canadian jobs, as well as a loss of major investments due to the labelling of the plastics as toxic. My colleague explained well in the last meeting that while industry may understand the definition of toxic under CEPA, most Canadians hear toxic and think of something that is very dangerous and that can kill you—things such as asbestos.

My first question is on jobs, and I'll turn to our friend at Merlin Plastics first, to get his perspective.

Do you agree that there's a potential for Canadian jobs to be lost if nothing changes?

Mr. Tony Moucachen: Could you please be more specific?

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: I'm sorry. It's with regard to the toxic label, if nothing changes with regard to the toxic label right now under CEPA.

Mr. Tony Moucachen: I fundamentally believe that plastics are not a toxic and should not be under the toxic label. Putting them under toxic will cause harm to Canadian industry. Also, it misleads the public, as you have said. People are going to understand toxic as something that's going to kill them, yet plastics save lives.

We just heard from Monsieur Olivier. He's recycling the masks, and we know the benefit of the masks to prevent COVID-19. By putting a label that this is a toxic material, some people are going to understand exactly the definition of what it means, but the majority of people may or may not understand it, and by labelling it in that way, it's going to trickle down to anybody who is in the plastics manufacturing business. Virgin resin can be a moulder or can be a recycler.

● (1655)

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Where are these jobs, in your opinion? Are they located here in Canada?

Mr. Tony Moucachen: Yes. I don't have the complete...but there are jobs in making virgin resin in Canada. There are multiple jobs. It's a big industry. There are jobs in moulding product across Canada, everywhere, in Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta. People are making products: food packaging, soft drink packaging, beverage containers and every article that is made out of plastic. All of a sudden, people will say, “Hold on a second. Is this going to hurt me?” I personally believe it's going to hurt to label plastics as toxic. Also, to me, it's not toxic. I have it in my fridge. I go to the hospital and it's there in the IV. It's everywhere.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: You bring up a good point. It is everywhere. I think about the hospitals here in Edmonton, Alberta, that are using the IV bags, plastic bags. Labelling those as toxic could have an impact on whether or not we could use those bags.

On the employment of people who make those bags, do you have any analysis on perhaps the number of jobs or the impact that this would have on, say, small businesses that we've heard from on this? I'm trying to get the scope of how big this would be.

Mr. Tony Moucachen: I know it's very big, but I don't have.... I know people who have it and I can get it for you. The plastics industry should have something of that sort, so I can get that information for you. I don't have it—

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: I appreciate that. I think that would be extremely helpful as we write our report.

This will be my last question. I'll get you to weigh in, if you don't mind. Do you think the reduction of plastics is attainable without this label?

Mr. Tony Moucachen: Yes, I believe it is. Economics works, just like Maja mentioned. If you have a choice, you just have to price it correctly. What's the environmental impact? Then you have to price it properly. We know incentives work. They work everywhere. They work in our personal lives. In my life, they work with my kids, and in work. If you incentivize a job, it's going to be done and it's going to be done well.

I don't personally believe in a ban. It's like a stick versus a carrot, and it has been proven that a carrot works better than a stick.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go now to Mr. Longfield for five minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you to the witnesses and, again, to the clerks for a very interesting panel this afternoon.

Mayor Vodanovic, you made a comment that Canada is not heading toward better recycling. We heard something similar from the recycling businesses in British Columbia and Alberta a few meetings ago. They said, “You're not going in the right direction.”

Your market solution that you were describing sounded a lot like carbon pricing to me: that you price what you don't want and incent what you do want. It also needs to work with the provinces. I know that Quebec has been a leader in climate-change pricing, as well as in environmental.

What message could we be sending to our partners across the country in provincial or municipal governments?

● (1700)

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: It's not a tax. I work with PAC. I work with the industry—I mean, I'm a volunteer—and I sometimes go to their meetings just to create the standard. It's very interesting, because they want this standard. They want to be able to say within the industry, “Hey, my package is a good one—it's worth something—and this package is not good.” They want to do that.

A good package should not pay the same fees for recycling as a bad package. They already pay fees.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: In effect, you're putting a value on this as a resource versus defining it as waste.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: Exactly.

In Lachine, where I live, we changed the zoning because we couldn't have recycling facilities operating in Lachine. It was considered that they work with garbage. Recycling is quite new, and we need to change many laws and regulations in order to make it happen.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Now the pressure on municipalities.... Guelph has been a leader in recycling in Canada. We have had three-stream recycling for a long time. We haven't gotten down to the different streams of plastic, but we get some recovery, as a municipality, by processing recycling for other communities around us.

We just did a study that was putting forward an idea of limiting the transportation of waste across borders.

Maybe I will start with you and go over to Mr. Moucachen on this: that the supply chain for recycled product is a very important part that we need to keep open.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: Yes. We need to keep the chain open. That's why we need to make a national standard across Canada—a national system and a national standard for labelling—because small boroughs are just too small to create the quantity we need.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: If we don't, it's going to end up in the landfills in municipalities that are already overburdened with not having enough space in their landfills.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: Yes, and it will cost a fortune.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

Mr. Moucachen, does Merlin have anything to add? How do you work with the producers, as well as with recyclers? It sounds like there's a burgeoning industry just waiting to burst through here.

Mr. Tony Moucachen: I have been working through many organizations—North American—like the Association of Plastic Recyclers. The most important thing is the package itself. The package has to be designed right. If the package is not designed right, then you can build infrastructure to collect it and you can move it from one place to another, but all you will be doing is increasing your carbon footprint.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Right, so if you knew you had.... The cost of not doing a proper design is going to catch you on the user-responsibility fees. It's going to make you double-check your design criteria.

Mr. Tony Moucachen: It's going to double-check the design criteria also in two ways. First, if you don't make it right, it's going to double-check you there. Also, it's going to prevent you from meeting your goal.

In one sense, you could stand up and say, “I want to be part of the circular, and I want to have 25% circular,” but when your package is not designed to be circular, how can you do it?

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you very much.

Mr. Olivier, I have a limited amount of time. It sounds like you have a social enterprise ready to go. Is there a role for social enterprise in doing the sorting and recycling?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Olivier: Yes, social enterprises certainly have a role to play. With masks, one of the micro-businesses that I am aware of uses groups that provide work for persons with disabilities. It means that it can condition and sort the material. That company currently does the recovery with small suppliers, such as small schools and certainly dentists' offices. Just look at dentists' offices. They have always used a lot of masks. So they need people to collect the material and people to sort it, to make sure that only polypropylene masks will enter that process and other protection equipment will go into a different process. The social economy always [*Inaudible—Editor*]

● (1705)

The Chair: That's great. Thank you.

Ms. Pauzé, the floor is yours.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: We know that humans are being exposed to micro-plastics in what they eat, drink and breathe. Last autumn, Environment and Climate Change Canada published a scientific assessment of plastic pollution, which summarizes its effects on the environment and our health.

Mr. Olivier, I am going to go back to the question I asked you, because we did not have the time to talk about it. People always say that virgin plastic is reliable and of high quality. But they also talk about the importance of having recycled and compostable plastic. At the same time, we are being warned against the materials that might replace the plastic in our six single-use items, like straws, which could be made with plants and acid-infused paper. We dealt with that at another meeting.

Could you sort it all out for us? Could you help us choose the proper solution?

Mr. Marc Olivier: I will answer the question in three parts. The first is very short. We must not claim that commonly used plastics are made of toxic material. This is simply because the word “toxic” has a definition similar to those used in normalized categories and properties. If you look at the WHMIS, the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System, you will see a category of toxic material used in the workplace that describes exactly what the toxic properties are. None of our usual plastics fall into that category. The plastic itself is not toxic.

Then we are told that plastics can have substances contaminating their surface, substances that themselves are not very good. Now I really have to tell you that, in terms of industrial hygiene, the concentrations are so low that we are not able to observe any very specific and normalized effects of that contamination.

Second, you said that products made with alternative materials have to be used, such as paper straws. Does a paper or cardboard straw do the job if it is infused?

The quantity of the material used for the infusion and which can separate and pass into the digestive system is so small that you really have to compare the advantages and disadvantages side by side. Personally, I find the disadvantages are particularly weak and the advantages are very intriguing.

Third, we must not forget that, if we are using plastic materials that are not durable, we will go nowhere with materials that we call biodegradable or “biofragmentable”. They are a waste of energy and a waste of material.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think we are all going back to drinking from fountains.That's how far we've come.

Ha, ha!

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Ha, ha! Yes.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Perhaps picking up where Mr. Olivier left off in this discussion of toxicity, it seems from a number of the previous witnesses that there's a real conflation between the way in which CEPA defines “toxic” and more of a health sciences definition of toxicity. I note that currently under CEPA there are a number of products listed under the definition of toxic, such as CO2, heating oil and ozone—products that would not necessarily meet that health sciences definition.

It feels to me, and I want to check this with you, that the plastics industry is reacting to the stigma of the word toxic without looking at the underlying definition in CEPA. We've heard other witnesses talk about the reputational damage that could ensue if the word “toxic” is linked to these products. Have heating oil, CO2 or ozone suffered in the marketplace because of a connection under CEPA to the word “toxic”?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Olivier: The best example is table salt, NaCl, that all of you use. However, I can kill you with NaCl. It's just a matter of how much you use.

Toxicity is all about dosage. By dosage, we mean the concentration and the duration of the exposure. I am currently breathing 418 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere here. Carbon dioxide is not toxic for me, but the dosage could lead to a toxic situation, if the concentration were greatly increased.

Saying that such and such a substance is toxic is linguistic inflation, because almost anything can be toxic if the concentration is high enough. The doses that we are exposed to do not put us in a situation of toxicity. The word ”toxic” is sometimes used as a bogeyman, to scare people, but we must not use it like that.

● (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Olivier.

Mr. Albas, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas: Great. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start again by thanking all of our witnesses, but the majority of my questions will be for the Retail Council.

In your submission to the CleanBC consultation, you stated that exemptions should be made to bans for items that impact accessibility, such as plastic straws. This is certainly something we've heard during the study. My question to you is, how do you expect that will work?

Mr. Philippe Cantin: That's a very good question.

When you look at certain places in the city of Vancouver, they've introduced accessibility aspects by just requiring businesses to have those items on hand if a customer asks for them and is clearly in need of the item for an accessibility reason. They are not to just leave them available for every other customer. That's the approach they've taken in Vancouver.

I wouldn't necessarily be able to give you more ideas of what this would look like. I think Vancouver right now is the only jurisdiction that has introduced those requirements.

Mr. Dan Albas: If we had that right across the country, the number of people who would need these products for accessibility reasons isn't sufficient to maintain a domestic manufacturing industry, and importing it would be expensive. The government hasn't even said it will allow the importation. Wouldn't only allowing these exemptions increase the cost for a person with a disability?

Mr. Philippe Cantin: As I mentioned earlier, it's very difficult to tell what the costs impact would be. Definitely, when there's less volume of a material on the market, the cost is more expensive, but that's something I would have to look into further to let you know if this would have a major impact or not.

Mr. Dan Albas: Well, to me it seems that if we banned domestic production, many domestic producers who do a good job right now of making a safe product would say, “You're going to allow imports?”, and vice versa. I think the government really has an issue here, when it comes to deciding on this.

You've also argued that significant regulatory reform is needed as a precursor to bans, especially in the areas of health and safety. Has this been done, or will the bans have negative consequences such as those you've warned about?

Mr. Philippe Cantin: That's what I mentioned to your colleague earlier, when I talked about the interactions with Agriculture Canada requirements. They're not necessarily moving at the same pace when it comes to adjusting the requirements.

Most of the reason certain companies are going with plastic packaging is that it's the only cost-effective and viable solution on the market to comply with the requirements from Agriculture Canada. That's something we need to keep in mind when we're looking at why certain plastics are introduced on the market for certain packaging.

Mr. Dan Albas: If I have some time, Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask Mayor Vodanovic a question.

● (1715)

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Dan Albas: First of all, you mentioned earlier that the government ban is not on a wide enough range of items to have a serious effect. If you had your choice between what the government is proposing now and seeing EPR common standards right across the country, which would you choose?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: I wouldn't choose. I would say, do this first and then do the other one second, but do it all. You can't choose—

Mr. Dan Albas: In the National Zero Waste Council's report on a food loss and waste strategy, you state that there is “strong correlation between foods with the highest percentage of wastage and the least amount of packaging”—essentially, that proper packaging reduces food waste.

Wouldn't, then, eliminating some plastic packaging and declaring all plastic packaging toxic increase food waste?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: No, it wouldn't. I don't think we should mix up the two. If you go to the grocery store and see the thousands and thousands of containers of plastic there that are made with virgin plastic.... I think we have a lot of work to do together as federal and municipal governments. There's too much to do to argue about this. We should just—

Mr. Dan Albas: Are you discounting, though, what was argued in that Zero Waste report? Again, it found "strong correlation between foods with the highest percentage of wastage and the least amount of packaging".

That seems odd.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: No. It is a very small angle, I would say, that you're taking to discredit the notion that we should do anything about plastics. I think we should start with bans and do things smartly; do things a step at a time, and make sure the food is safe. We could do it all. Canadians are smart. We can move away from virgin plastics all over the place.

Mr. Dan Albas: I think it was a reasonable question, but I appreciate that you may not agree with the angle I'm coming from. When someone says there's a strong correlation between two things, I think it's reasonable to ask about it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thanks.

We have five and a half minutes for Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks, Chair. I'll be sharing my time with my colleagues.

I have one question for Mayor Vodanovic. You said earlier, in response to a colleague, and you said it multiple times, that banning certain things is a first step. I think those were the words you used.

My question for you is, is there anything else you would ban, beyond what's already on the list, and how would you determine what that is?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: That's a big question. I didn't have enough time to think about that one.

I would ban certain plastics that are not.... I know certain people can recycle number six plastics, but it takes a lot of energy to do it. There is certain really toxic stuff in number three that we should ban.

I would ban the stuff we cannot recycle and think about it on a more global scale. I don't think the federal government should take any time to argue about straws; I think we should look at it at a global level and see what we need to ban in order to have a healthier Canada all around.

I'm not afraid of toxicity, because so far we eat about—I think this is in one of the reports from the States—a credit card's amount of plastic a week; that's what we ingest. Plastic degrades into micro particles, and we eat it and don't know. As a precautionary principle, I would not say that this is a good thing. Maybe we don't have all of the studies, but to eat that much plastic a week is not a good thing.

I don't think we should be afraid to do what has to be done. You have to move forward and not get stuck in little details. That's the point. I'm sorry.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I appreciate that. There is no need to apologize. Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass the rest of my time to Mr. Saini.

Mr. Raj Saini: Thank you very much.

Mr. Moucachen, this question is for you.

At our last meeting, we talked about bioplastics. What's your opinion on bioplastics, and how feasible is it to include it? If you include it with fossil-based plastics, what would be the recycling implications? How would you take it apart?

Mr. Tony Moucachen: I think Mr. Olivier has touched on it, but I agree with him.

We currently have bioplastics in some PET and in some polyethylene. Once you make the ethylene and then turn it into polyethylene, it doesn't matter if the ethylene is bio-based or if it's oil-based ethylene.

Historically, oil has been cheaper to convert to ethylene, and natural gas has been cheaper to convert. The implication for recycling is none. Once it's a polyethylene, it's a polyethylene, regardless of it having come from a bio base or an oil base.

● (1720)

Mr. Raj Saini: Thank you very much.

I'll pass my remaining time to Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Mr. Saini; and thank you, Chair.

We keep circling around the bogeyman, which is toxicity. The science is clear: Plastic is toxic; it's clogging our waterways; it's affecting our wildlife; it affects our health when it's consumed through microplastics. Mr. Cantin also acknowledged that there is a toxic issue to plastic. We need to address it head on.

I'd like any final comments from Mayor Vodanovic or Mr. Cantin.

We drink soda that has CO2 in it. SodaStream is one of the biggest companies in the world that combines the use of CO2 and hard plastic so that people use them over and over again. Therefore, we shouldn't be afraid of the innovation of industry, of setting a line in the sand on what toxic implications are.

Mayor Vodanovic, do you have any final thoughts on that?

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: I think we should be brave enough and just go ahead and do what needs to be done.

Yes, microplastics in the ocean are everywhere and we don't know the damage it's doing our fish. We know it's damaging, so we really have to act now and not be afraid.

I want to answer Mr. Baker, because I remember now that we had two other things that we wanted to ban. One is helium balloons, which are incredibly dangerous because they fly over and they go into the ocean and create damage.

Also, cigarette butts are made of plastic. They should be done in a different way, because they go everywhere. Animals ingest them and it's very bad for their digestive system. It's something small, but it should be changed into something different from a plastic filter.

Ms. Saks, I took away your time about the toxicity. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: That's quite all right.

Mr. Chair, how are we for time? I think we're nearly done.

The Chair: Yes, pretty much.

Ms. Vodanovic, maybe we can have one final comment, for 10 or 15 seconds, in answer to Ms. Saks.

Ms. Maja Vodanovic: I'm willing to work more with you guys if you need me. I would love to send over more information and what we've done at the National Zero Waste Council.

Now we're starting a new area of study and work with the industry and government. It's a coalition for plastics with the National Zero Waste Council. I could send you information on that as well.

I'd be very happy to continue this conversation.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have one sort of tentative observation, and I wish somebody from the department was here, which they will be at some point. I was reflecting on how there seems to be a tension between listing something on CEPA or not listing something on CEPA and then wanting a national approach.

I suspect that unless something is listed on CEPA, there really is no federal jurisdiction. I guess that might be one of the reasons the government did that: so that it could show some federal leadership. Even the federal jurisdiction through CEPA was not a slam dunk. It was the result of a six-to-five Supreme Court decision in the nineties.

I hope somebody picks up that question and asks one of the officials when they appear.

This has been a really great panel. I must tell you that as of five o'clock on Friday we hadn't really put the panel together completely, and I was a little concerned that we'd be thin on the panel and that it wouldn't be a success, but I think it has been one of the best panels we've had on the subject.

I want to thank all the witnesses for their insights, which are rooted in great knowledge and experience, and I would like to thank all the members for their very good questions.

We're at the end of our time for this third panel on plastics. We have another couple left. It has been a great study so far.

Thank you, Mr. Albas, for suggesting it.

On that, I'll bang the gavel and wish everyone a good evening.