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Chair: Mr. John Aldag





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• (1545)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 69 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting for a briefing by the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development and officials, or other lead investigators, I'm assuming, on the 2023 reports 1 and 5.

We're in a hybrid format. Mr. Angus is online. He knows the drill and so do our colleagues here who have been before us, as well.

I'm going to use the handy clock system, so I will give 30-second notices with the yellow card, and I'll use the red card when time is up. Don't stop mid-sentence, but finish your thought, and we'll move to the next speaker.

For this first panel, I would like to welcome our witnesses. From the Office of the Auditor General, we have Jerry DeMarco, commissioner of the environment and sustainable development; Kimberley Leach, principal; and Isabelle Marsolais, director.

Welcome to all of you.

Mr. DeMarco, you have five minutes for an opening statement. When you're ready, I will start the clock, and then we'll get into rounds of questions after that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco (Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Office of the Auditor General):** Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to discuss reports 1 and 5 of our 2023 reports to Parliament entitled “Forests and Climate Change” and “Emission Reductions Through Greenhouse Gas Regulations—Environment and Climate Change Canada” respectively. Our reports were tabled in the House of Commons on April 20. Joining me today are Kimberley Leach and Isabelle Marsolais, who were responsible for these two audits.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

The five reports I presented to Parliament in April, including the two that we are discussing today, show that climate change and biodiversity loss are intrinsically linked. These two crises need to be addressed together through decisive and concerted actions.

I will start with our audit report on forests and climate change. The federal government launched the two billion trees program, which aims to counter climate change, enhance biodiversity and support human well-being. We found that given the number of trees planted so far, this program is unlikely to succeed unless significant changes are made.

Although Natural Resources Canada nearly met its goal to plant 30 million trees in 2021, it fell well short of its 2022 goal of 60 million trees. Delays in signing agreements with planting partners have significantly challenged the department's ability to plant the number of trees it had planned for 2022, and these delays will spill over to affect subsequent years, which have much more ambitious goals.

Since our audit, we understand that some progress has been made in signing additional agreements, but work remains to get the program on track to reach two billion trees planted by 2031. Even if that goal is achieved, the program's initial targets for carbon sequestration by 2030 and 2050 will not be met.

• (1550)

[English]

In addition, we found that the program missed opportunities to enhance biodiversity and habitat-related benefits over the long term. Natural Resources Canada disagreed with our recommendation to provide additional incentives for habitat restoration, as it believes that doing so could reduce available funding to meet the number of trees planted and climate mitigation objectives. However, habitat restoration is part of the solution to the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

We also found that Natural Resources Canada, working with Environment and Climate Change Canada, did not provide a complete and clear picture of how Canada's forests affect greenhouse gas emissions. For example, emission estimates varied significantly in reports over the years because of recalculations prompted by data updates. This changed whether forests were reported as a net source of emissions rather than capturing emissions, making it extremely difficult to make informed decisions.

I must stress how important it is that we do not give up on solutions such as the two billion trees program and that instead we change course to successfully implement these initiatives.

I will now turn to our audit report on emission reductions through greenhouse gas regulations. This audit examined whether the regulations achieved their targets and contributed to Canada's long-term climate change mitigation goals.

Environment and Climate Change Canada did not know the extent to which the greenhouse gas regulations we examined contributed to meeting Canada's overall emission reduction target. This was because the department's approach to measuring emissions did not attribute results to specific regulations, recognizing that it is challenging to do so because of interactions among policy measures.

When we looked at individual regulations, we found mixed results. The regulations aimed at reducing emissions from power generation achieved their performance targets, but some of the regulations that aimed to reduce emissions from vehicles did not. The department was also very slow to develop new regulations, such as those for clean fuels.

Regulations are an important element of achieving Canada's overall emission reduction target. However, without comprehensive impact information, the federal government does not know whether it is using the right tools to sufficiently reduce emissions to meet the target.

In conclusion, the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss are chronic, insidious and too often ignored because their gravity becomes apparent over the long term. The government can better use the policy tools it has to address these issues.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening remarks. We would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you for those opening statements.

Before we get started, I'd also like to welcome Ron Liepert, Joanne Thompson and Mike Morrice to our committee today.

Our first round is going to be six-minute questions, and first up we have Ms. Stubbs.

Ms. Stubbs, when you're ready, the floor is yours.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all of you for being here today.

I have a question off the top.

You noted in your reporting that the overall trajectory of emissions has been going upwards, except for one year. Could you clarify the rationale for emissions declining in that one specific year?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** The overall trajectory of emissions in Canada is conveniently pictured on the cover of one of our previous reports. This is the trajectory from 1990 to 2019. There has been a drop since then that coincides with the economic downturn associated with the COVID pandemic.

It's not possible for us to attribute exactly how much of that drop is pandemic related and how much is related to measures.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Thank you. I appreciate that. It was related to the economic downturn through the course of the pandemic.

Your conclusions, I think, are quite stunning. They should alarm every single Canadian, no matter what perspective they come from on this debate about policies and tools to reduce emissions.

Regardless of the debate on timelines or how to get there, or whatever one's perspective might be, I think it's stunning and shocking and ought to concern every Canadian that you have concluded the government does not measure the outcomes of specific regulations and does not seem to be able to attribute results attached to their words and various policy proposals.

Do you see this as a systemic problem overall, as an accountability issue, as a lack of will? What is your response in general to the department's rationale that it is difficult to make those assessments because of the interplay of various different policies?

• (1555)

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** There are definitely interactions amongst the many measures that Canada has employed to address climate change. However, that's not an excuse for a failure to monitor or at least estimate the effectiveness of the key policies, whether it's carbon pricing regulations, as is the subject of this report, subsidies or the other tools that are available. We recognize that there are interactions amongst the measures.

It wouldn't be so troubling if Canada's trajectory, as you noted, was going in the right direction from 1990 to now. Given that Canada's the only G7 country that's had an upward trajectory since 1990, we feel that more work needs to be done to isolate the problems, which measures are working and which ones aren't, recognizing, of course, that there are some challenges with respect to tie-ins or interactions between various measures.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** I would say, especially given the major consequences for the cost of living on everyday Canadians on their lives, on literally everything they buy or their transportation choices, that it is absolutely incumbent upon a government to be able to measure and attach results and outcomes to its policies and words.

Are you satisfied with the department's response about those challenges in measuring those outcomes? Can you give us any specifics? Do you have any confidence in the department's response so far that it actually will be improved and that Canadians will be able to have the information they deserve about this government's policy framework?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** For this report, the department agreed with our recommendations. I'm pleased that is the case.

With respect to the challenges of attributing specific reductions to specific measures, we do recognize, as I indicated in my previous answer, that there are some challenges. However, we would like to see them make more of an effort to do that.

Even if there are certain bundles or batches of measures that need to be assessed together, that's okay, too. It doesn't necessarily have to be going through all of the 80 to 120 measures that are found in the emissions reduction plan one by one. For the key ones, we do believe that they should be able to track them.

I say this because, as you'll note at paragraph—

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Can I clarify, sir?

Do you have confidence the department will be able to do that? Have they given you any indication that would assure you that some kind of change is happening and that will occur?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** I would say I won't be assured of that until I see the results.

That's a common theme in my responses to questions about predicting the future. I do prefer to see actual results rather than good intentions.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Likewise.

We agree wholeheartedly with your point about the importance of forests and biodiversity acting as carbon sinks. I also find it quite alarming that it looks like the current plans for tree planting are on track to only be about 3.8% of the overall promise.

You noted something in your reports that I've actually heard from growers over the last couple of years. They've been very reticent to raise it because of their concerns that they would potentially face some sort of retribution or not be able to benefit from the various commitments or agreements that are being undertaken.

Would you expand specifically on your concerns around the hardness and survival level of trees, whether or not that will be improved, and also the status of any provincial agreements? What are the holdups?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** I'll start with the survival issue.

Obviously, one can't assume that 100% of the trees will survive to maturity. There are many reasons for mortality in the forest. Some of those are increasing because of climate change itself, in terms of the number of forest fires.

We do recommend that they do a better job at modelling, assessing and monitoring the survival of these trees and not just assume that all of them will reach maturity. You can hear from the department directly in the next hour about their efforts in that regard.

I'm getting a red signal here.

**The Chair:** We're out of time on this one. We may be able to pick that up on a future round.

Next up we have Ms. Lapointe, who will have six minutes.

**Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Commissioner, thank you for your report and for taking the time to appear at committee today to help us deepen our understanding of the recommendations that you've made.

This morning, Minister Blair confirmed that this is Canada's worst wildfire season in a century.

Do you believe that the two billion trees program is a valuable program in light of the damage from wildfires that we will continue to see?

• (1600)

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes, it is a worthwhile program.

I should add that the concerns over this issue have become more obvious this year with the wildfire season. I would point you to paragraph 1.1 of our report where we mentioned, back in April, that climate change “will increase risks and negative effects for Canadians because of, for example, the number of heat waves and forest fires.” I wish that paragraph hadn't been so prescient for this year's fire season, but it was. We need to step up efforts to both mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The two billion trees program is worthwhile, and that's pretty much illustrated in exhibit 1.4. The payback period is long, though, so I'm pleased that this department is willing to take on a program that has such a long payback period. This is because, often, governments discount the future and do not necessarily favour long-term decision-making over short-term, which is lesson number eight from our climate report from 2021 on lessons learned.

There is an important payback in terms of carbon sequestration. It won't start to accrue until after 2030 or so, and that's illustrated in exhibit 1.4. Once those trees start getting more mature, there is a large degree of carbon sequestration that would result.

**Ms. Viviane Lapointe:** Thank you.

You mentioned in your report that there were delays in signing agreements with provinces and territories. To your knowledge, what contributed to these delays, and have you noted any progress on this front?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Since the closure of our audit period and the publication of our report, we understand from the department that they have signed quite a few more agreements and agreements in principle, and that the number of trees to be planted that are in the hopper—in the signed contracts—has increased significantly.

It's still a small percentage of the overall two billion, and obviously, the last six years of the program are when they really have to plant the majority of those trees. In the next hour, perhaps you could get an update from the department on the exact number of new agreements that have been signed since the close of our audit.

Our audit was an attempt to do an early stage assessment with the hope that they could course correct and catch up, and hopefully we will see that. I can't predict whether they will or not, but there has been some improvement since the close of our audit.

**Ms. Viviane Lapointe:** I noticed that you made some comments around the emissions reductions through greenhouse gas regulations. You said that your department had recently enhanced carbon pricing across Canada and brought the clean fuels regulations into force. The regulations focus on reducing emissions from electricity generation, oil and gas production, transportation and landfills.

Can you tell us why these measures are important and what the consequences would be of not taking these actions now?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** We assess the performance of the regulations brought in by Environment and Climate Change Canada or Natural Resources Canada. We aren't responsible for the decision to make those regulations or the contents of them.

Overall, regulations are an important part of the tool kit, along with carbon pricing and other measures, such as subsidies, procurement policies, education and so on. All of these combined together form Canada's approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In terms of the expectations of those new regulations in the four areas you just mentioned, I would suggest that you pose that question to the assistant deputy minister for Environment Canada, who will be here in the next hour.

**Ms. Viviane Lapointe:** Can you tell us if you've seen any progress by the ministry in implementing any of your recommendations that were contained in the report?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Since April, we have seen an uptick in the number of agreements. I'm going over to the two billion trees audit for the time being. We have seen an uptick in the number of agreements and agreements in principle signed, so that is a good sign that they're taking the matter seriously.

Our main finding was not that they won't make it to two billion trees; it was that they wouldn't make it unless they made significant changes. If they make those significant changes, they can reach the two billion trees target. They won't reach their sequestration targets for 2030 and 2050 as initially projected, but they will receive some benefits in the future, although on a slightly longer time horizon than they had originally foreseen.

• (1605)

**Ms. Viviane Lapointe:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will now go to Mr. Simard.

[*Translation*]

Over to you, Mr. Simard, for six minutes.

**Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here, Mr. DeMarco.

I get the sense from your report that you've made a stark observation, at least for 2022, when the department missed the target by a mile. That will necessarily have a domino effect. If the government fell that short of its 2022 target, the rest of the planting effort will presumably be affected.

You said that the government was unlikely to reach its target unless significant changes were made. Are those significant changes achievable, and does the government currently have a plan to make those changes?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** They are achievable. The government deployed a plan to catch up after planting just 16 or 17 million of the 60 million trees planned for 2022. I don't know whether the government will be able to make up for the delay, but implementing our recommendations would maximize its chances of meeting its targets.

We conducted our audit early on in the program so that we could provide the government with recommendations to help it meet its targets, instead of waiting until 2030 to ask why it didn't meet them. Therefore, yes, it is possible.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Thank you.

I'm from a forestry region, and my riding is home to the Observatoire régional de recherche sur la forêt boréale, a world-renowned regional observatory for boreal forest research. Staff there have explained to me numerous times that you can't just plant two billion trees wherever or however. It has to be planned out. Is it afforestation or reforestation? Are windbreaks being planted? Which species are being planted, and in which types of soil, if the idea is to track the potential benefits from greenhouse gas capture and sequestration? All of those factors have to be considered.

In your audit, did you look into the expertise being used by the government? Did the government have that kind of information and expertise in order to plant its two billion trees?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** We didn't examine that specifically, but we did note that the government did not endeavour to enhance biodiversity benefits over the long term as much as it could have. For example, in recommendation 47, we propose that the government provide incentives for habitat restoration, as I mentioned in my opening remarks. However, the government is resistant to that recommendation, despite the biodiversity and carbon storage benefits.

The government needs to leverage that expertise in order to maximize the benefits when it comes to carbon storage, biodiversity and human well-being. I hope the government will rethink its initial response to recommendation 47 in our report and make that effort.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Do you know what informed the selection of the people chosen to plant the two billion trees? Did you examine the basis on which the contracts were awarded to the private companies or consulting firms?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** At this point, our focus was more on the number of trees planted because the government was behind schedule. I don't know whether we looked at each contract awarded under the program, but that's a question you could ask the Natural Resources Canada officials when they appear during the second hour. I think they would be able to give you an answer.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Did you propose in any of your recommendations that the government seek out people with more expertise?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Our recommendations are aimed at maximizing the biodiversity and other benefits. They don't specifically address the expertise you're referring to.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** I see.

Let's turn to the timeline. The first time I heard about the two billion trees program was in connection with an election promise in 2019. When did the tree planting start? Is that mentioned in your audit?

• (1610)

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** The plan was announced in the 2019 throne speech. The department followed through and developed the two billion trees program in 2020.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Do you know how long after the program was developed that the first trees were planted?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes. Are you asking how many trees have been planted since the program was introduced?

**Mr. Mario Simard:** No. I'd like to know how much time there was between when the program was launched and when people were on the ground planting the first trees.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Exhibit 1.3 in the report shows that 28.9 million trees were planted in 2021 and 16.5 million were planted in 2022.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** All right.

I know that you talked a lot about the tree survival rate in your report, so I will follow up on that during my next turn. Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** We're out of time on that one. We will get back to you, Mario, for at least one more short round on this.

Next, we're going online to Mr. Angus for six minutes.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Thank you so much, Commissioner, for joining us today. Your reports are so important.

I'm here in northern Ontario where the rain has finally come, and hopefully, that will push back the devastating wildfires that are throughout our region. Neighbouring Abitibi was on fire. Sept-Îles was on fire. Halifax was on fire. There were 30,000 people displaced in Alberta.

You wrote in your report about your efforts that you raised again and again to get the Liberal government to get serious on emissions reductions. You wrote:

When I look at all of the Office of the Auditor General of Canada's reports that have flagged these grave concerns over the years, it's clear that we have been repeatedly ringing the alarm bells. Now these bells are almost deafening.

Are the alarm bells you're referring to the climate catastrophe that is upon us now?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** There are several alarm bells. In this report, we speak to the twin crisis of climate change and biodiversity loss. The dialogue focused mostly on climate change the last several years, but thankfully, there is more attention now to the related loss of biodiversity.

Yes, the alarm bells have been rung repeatedly by our office and by others. It is disappointing to see that emissions today, in 2023, in Canada, are higher than when Canada announced to the world in 1992 that it was signing on to first stabilize and then reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** The emissions are higher than when Prime Minister Trudeau went to COP26 and told the world that Canada would deal with emissions, that we put a cap in place, and that we had a plan, yet you wrote:

We can't continue to go from failure to failure; we need action and results, not just more targets and plans. Parliament must intensify efforts in the fight against climate change to make up for decades of missed opportunities and missteps.

I want you to explain that, because it seems to me that my fellow politicians sometimes think about climate change and say, "Oh, this is a bad year. Things will stabilize." We are on this accelerating curve of crisis, and it's getting worse and worse year by year.

What are the pressures to actually start to deliver and move beyond the promises? We deal with the fact that Canada is the only G7 country where oil and gas emissions will rise year in and year out.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** We have our overall report on climate lessons learned from 2021 where we look at the big picture. We do these deep dives into specific areas like today's regulations, the two billion trees program, or forest carbon accounting.

I would draw your attention to exhibit 1 in our forests and climate change report. We state at the end of paragraph 1.3:

While Canada's forests could help to reduce greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, this should not distract from the urgent need to reduce burning fossil fuels.

The biological capture of carbon through trees, plants, marine life and so on is helpful, but so long as we continue, as indicated in exhibit 1.1, to have a net large flux of fossil carbon from underground into the atmosphere, we will not surely tackle the climate crisis.

We do need to get a handle on human-driven emissions from fossil fuels. It's helpful, and forests are definitely a part of the equation in terms of helping address, mitigate and adapt to climate change, but until we actually bring the trajectory of emissions down from fossil fuel use, we will not succeed in limiting global temperature rise or avoid catastrophic climate change.

• (1615)

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Absolutely, and we had the promise of an emissions cap with no plan. We still have no emissions cap, and emissions are going up.

I noticed on the issue that you raised on the failure to monitor, the failure to track, how is it possible for the government to make promises on reductions if it's not actually tracking and it doesn't have in place the procedures and the data to understand what is happening with emissions in the oil and gas sector?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** The emissions are up from 1990 to now, which is the reference year for when the world got together to create the climate convention in 1992. There has been a slight decrease in emissions from the 2005 reference level until now. I'm hopeful that we can see that continue and that at some point in the next while we would actually see at least us getting back to the starting point of 1990 and then eventually get into reductions. But Canada is in the unenviable position that 30 years after starting this journey towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions and avoiding catastrophic climate change, we're actually behind the original starting line. We haven't even just made slow progress from the starting line. We've taken a step back.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** We are the only one in the G7.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** We are the only G7 country that has a net emissions increase since 1990 until now.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** That's a failure.

**The Chair:** Charlie, you have 10 seconds left.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I noticed that you said of the 399 progress reports that were supposed to be produced by Environment and Climate Change Canada, they only produced one. Is that complacency? Is that lack of staff? What is it?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** You're now turning to one of the other reports, which I do happen to have with me, on species at risk.

Yes, there are a number of problems with respect to Environment and Climate Change Canada's capacity to keep up with the growing number of species at risk in Canada. I would be pleased to return to this committee and speak about our suite of biodiversity-related reports, which are of equal importance to the ones we're talking about today.

**The Chair:** We're going to have to stop there.

We're going to go into a second round, which is going to be five minutes, five minutes, two and a half, two and a half, five, five, and then we'll see where we are at that point.

First for a five-minute round I have Mr. Patzer.

Whenever you're ready, Mr. Patzer, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Fantastic, thank you.

Thank you, everybody, for coming. It's much appreciated.

I will obviously go to you, Mr. Commissioner. On page 15 of report 5, it mentions how the phase-out of coal is on track by 2030, but I also know that in another one of your reports in regard to the just transition—we had it when we were on public accounts—it talked about the complete failure of the government to support the communities who were going to be phased out by this. In fact, the government lost two years. It did nothing for two years on this. I'm just wondering if you considered looking at that as well while you were going through this and looking at it and seeing that the government is still on track for that, but not making any mention of the communities affected.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** On our just transition report—and Principal Leach who is here with me today was also responsible for that report—we'll consider doing a follow-up on that if we see some

tangible progress that can be followed up on. Even when we reported on that issue and we commented that there still wasn't framework legislation in place to transition workers, or sustainable jobs, whatever the new phrase will be for that program, we still don't have that framework. There's not that much point in revisiting it just yet because not a lot has happened on that file since our report.

Part of transitioning the economy towards a more green economy and a more sustainable economy means also opening doors for those affected: the communities, the workers, and so on. That's certainly possible with a green shift towards a more renewable economy, but it needs to be done deliberately rather than in a reactive manner. Our recommendations stand from our just transition report that we should not be leaving people behind in the transition and be more proactive in opening doors and not just looking at softening the blow from closing doors.

● (1620)

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer:** It's pretty ironic that the only thing they seem to be on track for is shutting down those plants, which is going to devastate those communities. To the point that you just made, there is no framework yet for those communities and what they're going to do, and yet the clock is ticking.

I want to pick up quickly on a point you made earlier on tree planting. You referenced agreements with provinces for planting. I'm just wondering which provinces those are.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** The number of agreements and agreements in principle has grown since the close of our audit period. I believe in the opening statement from the department officials, which you'll hear in the second hour, they will be able to give you specific numbers. They may be able to tell you which provinces have newly signed agreements.

We know from media clippings and so on that there's been an announcement from British Columbia, with the minister making an announcement there. As for the other provinces, I would direct your question to the departmental officials in the next hour.

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer:** Okay. We'll look forward to doing that.

Paragraph 5.24 states the following: "For the coal-fired regulations, the sensitivity analysis was not extensive and did not report estimated greenhouse gas emission reductions."

Can you elaborate on that a little bit? I think that's a pretty damn-ign statement. Can you just elaborate on what that means?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes. We're encouraged by the department's response that they're going to up their efforts on sensitivity analysis. This is essentially looking at the various sources of uncertainty in their model and how those sources of uncertainty affect the model's results and the variation. It's looking at correlations and things like that.

This is part of this attribution question that we got at earlier. In order to course correct and actually meet a target, such as the 2030 target or the interim goal before then, they need to not only have timely information, which we don't have in Canada—we often have to wait two years to see the emissions data for the country in terms of the reports under the NIR—but also better track, with all of these measures that are going on, which ones are having more of an effect on bending the curve and which ones aren't. There's—

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer:** Okay. I have only 30 seconds left here, so I'll ask you one last question.

With regard to clean fuel regulations, you mentioned earlier that the other crisis is the loss of biodiversity. Have you looked into the amount of loss of grasslands and forest lands that will be attributed to pursuing growing more biofuels rather than focusing on growing food—or even preserving those grasslands for agricultural purposes?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes, we will be looking at the interplay between agriculture and climate change in future audits. It's an important point you make, though, because it's important to look at the full picture and not have a squeezing of the balloon, which can occur when you attempt to fix one problem and it just creates another problem elsewhere. Certainly, there have been concerns in especially the mid-continent of Canada and the U.S., where there has been habitat loss created by subsidies toward ethanol and so on.

It needs to be done in a way that doesn't simply transfer the problem somewhere else. I think that's what you were getting at.

**The Chair:** We're out of time for this round.

We'll go next to Mr. Chahal, who has five minutes.

**Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Commissioner, for joining us today and for your work.

In your opening remarks, you talked about how climate change and biodiversity are linked. Can you speak further to how the “two billion trees” program supports biodiversity?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Absolutely, especially if the department revisited its response to our recommendation on linking tree planting with habitat restoration. You all know the old adage of not being able to see the forest for the trees. This is a perfect example of that. If we focused just on tree planting without looking at restoring the habitat or the ecosystem in question, we wouldn't be maximizing the benefits.

If the tree planting is done in a deliberate way, where the co-benefits for biodiversity and for human well-being, such as recreation, shade or mitigating urban heat islands and so on, are done in a deliberate way, instead of just looking at, “Oh, let's just meet our number of trees”.... An unfortunate scenario would be if there's a

proliferation of monoculture tree plantations that aren't really forests. There are some natural monocultures in Canada, so it's not a case where you should never plant the same tree species on a site, but generally speaking, there will be more biodiversity benefits accruing with a more diverse planting approach. We have a recommendation about that in terms of dovetailing the tree-planting goals with habitat restoration.

That's become all the more important because of the Montreal biodiversity framework from the latest Conference of the Parties, where there's a new target—I believe it's target two—about restoring 30% of degraded lands. Here's a great opportunity, through reforestation rather than just tree planting, to restore forests rather than just creating tree plantations.

● (1625)

**Mr. George Chahal:** Thank you.

You talked about how in 2021 we hit close to our targets—we hit our targets—and you also mentioned in your opening remarks that there were challenges in dealing with our partners. Can I say that those are supply chain issues in obtaining enough trees to be planted? Can you talk a bit more specifically about those challenges with our partners?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Well, there are numerous challenges—rightly so. For private industry working in the nursery area, if they're going to supplement their current approach—because there's a lot of reforestation going on just in the normal course of forestry, so this is supposed to be two billion incremental trees, not just double-counting the ones that would be done for forest management generally—they don't want to make those investments in seedlings unless they know there's going to be a demand for them.

The federal government can't create that demand on its own because most Crown land in Canada is provincially controlled, so that's a key partner, right, with those agreements with the provinces. If the provinces agree with Canada as the federal government to enter into long-term agreements, then you'll have that certainty for industry to invest in the massive amount of seedlings that would be needed on top of the current stock that's used for typical forestry management.

**Mr. George Chahal:** You said there were many issues. What were some of the other issues?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** I think I'll turn to Principal Leach to discuss some of the other issues, because there are a lot of actors at play here in terms of provinces, territories, communities and indigenous communities and so on.

Ms. Leach can elaborate on that question.

**Ms. Kimberley Leach (Principal, Office of the Auditor General):** Yes.

Thanks very much for the question.

The difference between achieving the 2021 target and not achieving the 2022 target was the lack of agreements with the provinces. Provinces are the group that will plant the most trees. Almost 70% of the trees that are to be planted through this program will be by provinces and territories.

In 2022, they decided that they wanted an agreement in principle with the provinces before they started to have project proposals accepted. That was really the significant challenge that happened in 2022.

**Mr. George Chahal:** Do you think the two billion trees program is a valuable program and we should continue with it?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Absolutely it's a valuable program, especially if it's done in a way that maximizes co-benefits with biodiversity and human well-being.

Even on carbon sequestration, even if the initial targets for 2030 and 2050 won't be met, there will be significant sequestration, as illustrated in exhibit 1.4 of our report. It just takes a little longer because of the pace of growth and the fact that most of these trees are being planted in the last part of the program rather than the first part.

It's certainly worthwhile doing if it's done in a deliberate and informed way that truly does try to maximize those benefits I spoke about and provide additional benefits to species at risk and biodiversity generally.

• (1630)

**Mr. George Chahal:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next we're going to Mr. Simard, who will have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Thank you.

After reading your reports, Mr. DeMarco, I got the feeling that the government established principles and rules without necessarily having a feedback loop to ascertain whether those principles and rules were effective.

It brings to mind your 2021 report on the emissions reduction fund. After reading that report, I learned that, far from reducing emissions, the program had led to an increase. The same is true of the two billion trees program. The government established a principle but didn't come to an agreement with the provinces regarding the planting of those two billion trees. The government doesn't have a feedback loop.

You talk about regulating and reducing emissions, and Minister Guilbeault said a while ago that it was necessary to stop providing the fossil fuel sector with financial support and inefficient subsidies. However, we don't know what constitutes an inefficient subsidy.

I don't want to put words in your mouth, but is the government quicker to establish principles than to consider how they are put into practice and what results they have?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** The government needs to pay a lot more attention to results, which is a common theme in our reports. The government also needs to be realistic with its programs. You brought up the emissions reduction fund report, but there's the two billion trees program report and the hydrogen report. All three reports pertain to the same department, and the same problems are flagged from one report to the next, so I'd like the department to take the lessons learned from 2021 and focus on results, not just plans and targets. Now, we need to see results.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** You said the word "realistic", so some of the government's initiatives may not be realistic. Do you think getting rid of fossil fuel subsidies is the most effective and realistic way to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** I believe we've already appeared before the committee on that issue, probably last year. Yes, we released two subsidy reports. Canada has long been saying that it's going to end its subsidy participation, but the debate around what constitutes an inefficient subsidy continues. I agree that it's been going on too long and that the government needs to take action on that front as well.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We're out of time there.

Next up is Mr. Angus, who will have two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Thank you.

I want to go back to your comments about how you have been repeatedly ringing the alarm bells and now these bells are almost deafening.

All across the eastern United States and central Canada, the smoke from Canadian forest fires burning has left.... Flights have been cancelled. People have been forced to stay indoors. People have been sent to the hospital. We're dealing with a different kind of beast with these fires—the intensity and the fact that they're burning right down to the soil. This is not rejuvenating our forests. These have extremely devastating impacts on biodiversity and animal life. Yet, we see the two billion trees program. To me, it seemed like such a perfect Instagram quote, our doing this.

When I read your report, I saw that we are not only seriously missing the target but also, in terms of reductions being planned.... It's 0.1 megatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. Is that, in any way, sufficient to address the emissions coming out, heating our planet, destroying our forests and threatening communities?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** You're referring to paragraph 1.22 of our report, where we comment that their initial estimates of the carbon sequestration benefits resulting from this program were not realistic and that they would only generate 0.1 megatonnes by 2030 and 4.3 by 2050. These are relatively insignificant amounts. There are greater sequestration benefits further out, beyond 2050, as the trees grow larger.

It means that we should not distract ourselves, with programs like this, from the urgent need to address fossil fuel emissions. That's the key thing Canada needs to deal with.

● (1635)

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I love planting trees. We have tree planters up here all the time. That's great, but it is not a substitute for putting in a cap and dealing with the emissions coming out. I think it's a very important element.

The one other thing I want to ask you about is the kind of tree.

We know that deciduous trees, such as aspen, can provide dramatic breaks for fire. However, we know that industrial forestry is basically planting burners. You talked about monocropping. Has the government looked at the kinds of trees that would not only be able to sequester carbon but also be resisters to wildfires burning through coniferous forests?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** For the most part, if you're walking through Canada's forests, there's a diversity of species. It's not like a tropical rainforest, with that level of diversity, but there is a diversity. There are some areas—lodgepole pine and certain stands of aspen and so on, for example—where it is close to being a monoculture, at least at the site scale.

There have been recent studies about that. I don't profess to be an expert in the area. The University of Alberta has recently been studying the fact.... Their findings were that.... I believe it was Professor Chang at the University of Alberta who published in the journal *Nature*, this year, that a more diverse planting not only has the biodiversity benefits we talked about in our report but also has the benefits you're talking about, in terms of being more climate-resilient and resisting, or at least diminishing, the intensity or extent of fires.

You may wish to hear from experts in those areas of forest ecology and forest fires, in order to hear more about that. I'm intrigued by those new studies.

**The Chair:** We're out of time on this one.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're now going to Mr. Dreeshen, who will have five minutes.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I want to start with a couple of different things.

I'm glad you mentioned the two billion trees. It's never really been discussed that it's in addition to what is already done. Many people don't understand that it takes about two and a half years for the provinces to put in two billion trees, and they're at about 800 million per year at this particular point in time. Yes, it's a target, but I also think we should realize that these partners are already stretched. Nevertheless, they have the capability, and if we can get the seeds to them, they will be able to move forward with it. I'm glad you mentioned that, because I think that's important for folks to understand.

My other thought is that one of the aspects of the massive forest area losses right now are that we have two choices. Either we can emphasize planting there or we can let nature do its own thing. Now that we have the forest floor burnt off and all of this extra fuel gone, we can make sure it will do what it's supposed to do, which is what has happened for tens of thousands of years. Hopefully, we can sort that part out.

Another thing I would like to talk about is that you said that since 1992, we haven't done very much on this. Twenty-three of those years have been under a Liberal government, but we see that there are issues.

One thing you also talked about has to do with carbon pricing.

In a 2022 report, when you compare a bunch of countries on U.S. dollars per tonne for carbon, for all of the western hemisphere and counting China, the costs for Canada are five to 11 times that of these individual countries. If we take a look at Argentina, it's \$5 per tonne, compared to our \$40 at that time. Mexico is \$3.7. Colombia and Chile are \$5 in each case. China is between \$8 and \$9—I have a little trouble figuring out what that is.

We have this massive tax for us here in Canada. How do our results compare to these other countries that I mentioned when we're looking at five to 11 times more that we pay, and that's when we look at \$40 U.S. per tonne as the number?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** There's a lot there.

I guess I'll start with your second point first, which is natural forest fires. Especially in the boreal forest of Canada or in the tall grass prairies and so on, fire has been an important part of the ecosystem for thousands of years. However, it's the intensity and the extent and the frequency of fires that are of concern now. Jack pines evolved with fires as being part of their life history in terms of the evolution of their cone structure and so on.

We're not saying that all forest fires are bad, but when you're getting this extent of fire over the long-term norm, then that is a big concern.

● (1640)

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** If I could jump in there, how much of that is related to changes in forest management that have taken place in the last 10 to 15 years? Was that ever analyzed?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** We haven't done that analysis.

There's a whole new area of attribution science in terms of trying to pinpoint the increases in severity of any type of event like forest fires, severe weather or hurricanes with climate change versus other things like forestry practices. We haven't done that, but there is an area of scientific inquiry and there are experts you could draw on for more information on that.

To your second point about carbon pricing, it's very complicated to compare across countries. Just like Canada, there are so many different measures in place in each country. You could have a high carbon price and not very strong regulations and get to where you want. You could have a lot of regulations and no carbon pricing and get to where you want. You could have subsidies. There are a whole bunch of different factors involved.

Simply comparing us to a country that doesn't have carbon pricing or to one that has a higher carbon price, like Sweden, you have to look at the whole suite and see how we're doing. Our whole suite, from 1990 to now, has not been a good package. We have not got the reductions.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** That was the point I was making.

I have just a few seconds left.

What kind of a deal are Canadians getting by paying \$40 compared to what is happening in all of the competing nations we have, such as China and all of the western hemisphere?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** That's exactly why we want them to track the measures or bundles of measures in how they're doing as opposed to just getting to 2030 and saying, "Again, we didn't make it. Something was wrong. We're not sure what."

We would like to see course correction and more timely measurement and monitoring of the measures.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We're out of time on that one.

We're going now to Mr. Sorbara for the last five minutes.

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Commissioner and team. Thank you for your service and for what you do, not only for MPs but for all Canadians.

On the report on the emissions reduction through greenhouse gas regulations, the first thing I'd like to do is thank you for acknowledging the more than 100 policy measures that our government has put in place to combat climate change. They are obviously layered. There are many regulations, but it is the right direction in terms of combatting climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions overall. I think you put that in context in paragraph 5.13, if I'm not mistaken.

From that, I have two questions in my time permitted. The first one is on paragraph 5.57 with regard to our electrical grid and the ongoing phase-out of coal-fired electricity. I believe the target is 2035 when we'll have an electrical grid that is clean in the context of non-emitting GHGs.

On 5.57, please elaborate further in terms of:

Environment and Climate Change Canada established performance targets, indicators, and expected outcomes for the electricity sector regulations we examined and that the regulations had achieved their targets to date.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** This part of our report focuses on the coal-fired generation of electricity regulations and reaching their target. This is not as complicated as some of the other issues that we've just talked about. It's still a big endeavour to deal with this,

but we found that Canada did appear to be on track working with the provinces.

Obviously, the federal government does not have direct control over electricity generation in Canada, but it can regulate it through the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

Yes, we did find that, with respect to the coal-fired generation of electricity regulations, they were on target for what they were expecting, and they appear to be on target for 2030 as well.

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Thank you.

My second topic relates to methane. Methane has been getting a lot of press, rightly so, for many reasons in the last several months and over the last few years. One thing we saw even during the COVID downturn and the freezing of economies is that worldwide methane emissions increased in the United States and so forth. As you say in paragraph 5.61, "methane is a potent greenhouse gas with at least 25 times the warming potential of carbon dioxide over a 100-year period".

I've read this part, and I've read some stuff online with regard to methane. We have put in place—a number of countries have put in place—measures to reduce methane emission. That is going to be one large aspect of meeting GHG emission targets for any country.

Is it a matter, in your view, Commissioner, that the data being collected needs to be strengthened or that the measures in place need to be strengthened or both? It is an economic win to reduce methane emissions and an environmental win to reduce methane emissions as we move forward.

● (1645)

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Getting a handle on methane emissions and then limiting them through measures such as regulation provide immediate benefits partly because of the relatively shorter time frame that methane spends in the atmosphere compared to CO<sub>2</sub> and because of their high warming potential, as you just talked about.

If we could get a better handle on methane emissions and then deal with them more effectively through regulations and other measures, that would go a long way. It would provide immediate benefits, as immediate as you can get on an issue like climate change, which is long term. Dropping emissions on methane saves a lot over a long period of time because of the difference between it and CO<sub>2</sub> in terms of its residency time in the atmosphere.

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** In terms of measuring methane, in 5.76 you speak to, as a policy point, a bottom-up approach versus a top-down approach. It seems that one captures more than the other. Is there anything you can elaborate on that, and is there anything else you could forward to me or the members to understand how we better measure methane emissions?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes. You'll have the department officials here in a few minutes as well to talk about their agreement and new funding with respect to getting a better handle on some of the emissions that have been historically not measured very well in Canada.

It's a theme between the two reports today. Land use, land use change and forestry emissions are not well understood in Canada, and methane emissions are not well understood in Canada. We need to get a better handle on both of those things so that we know what interventions need to be made to bring down those emissions from those two sectors.

**The Chair:** We're out of time.

Colleagues, that would normally take us to the end of the first round with the commissioner and his officials.

I have had a request from Mr. Morrice to give him, through unanimous consent, two and a half minutes for a round of questions.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Mr. Morrice, I'll go to you for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, colleagues. I appreciate that.

Our country is literally burning. The need for urgent action on the climate crisis is now only more clear for so many more Canadians across the country.

My question is about lobbying from the oil and gas industry that slows down the pace of progress. Specifically, Commissioner DeMarco, in report 5 you note that not only did Environment and Climate Change Canada not know whether the greenhouse gas regulations that you looked at contributed to emission reductions, but the clean fuel regulations were three years behind schedule. In your words, that's "jeopardizing the pace of Canada's emissions reductions", obviously.

We have a new round of regulations that have promised to be forthcoming on methane, clean electricity, and the oil and gas cap. I think it's pretty pertinent to understand whether we can move quickly and with the kind of stringent regulations that we need.

Last week, we learned that a Suncor executive helped write a climate plan of this government.

My question for you, Mr. DeMarco, is whether you've seen any evidence that involvement from the oil and gas industry led to the three-year delay in the clean fuel regulations.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Thank you for the question.

The reasons for the delay that the department told us related to COVID, capacity and so on. Obviously, the oil and gas industry

was an important stakeholder in some of these regulations, so they were part of the consultation process.

I would suggest—if you're given permission by the committee—that you ask some of that question of the department, in terms of specifically whether they were a cause of delay, as opposed to simply participating in the public process leading up to the regulations being promulgated.

To your point, five years for a cornerstone piece of regulation, which, by the way, was only dealing with one of the three phases of fuels rather than all three.... They scaled down the scope of the regulation and then took more years to actually finish it.

I agree with you that if the government, the United Nations and the world are going to call this a global climate crisis, then we need to act like it. That means acting with dispatch.

Every time we work on reducing emissions more quickly, there's essentially a compound return for that because of the long time that greenhouse gas emissions stay in the atmosphere. The faster we act, the better and more return on investment we'll get. We'll stop more of the accumulation of these long-lasting gases in the atmosphere.

• (1650)

**The Chair:** Thank you. That takes us to the end of that.

Colleagues, we're going to suspend briefly so we can switch out the panels.

I'd like to thank Mr. DeMarco, Ms. Marsolais and Ms. Leach for being here today.

With that, colleagues, we're suspended. We'll be back in just a minute.

• (1650)

(Pause)

• (1655)

**The Chair:** We're back in session.

I'd like to thank our officials in our second panel here from the Department of the Environment. We have some regular faces, so welcome back.

We have Marc D'Iorio, assistant deputy minister, science and technology branch; John Moffet, assistant deputy minister, environmental protection branch; Jacqueline Gonçalves, director general, science and risk assessment, science and technology branch; Derek Hermanutz, director general, strategic policy branch; Nicholas Winfield, director general, Canadian wildlife service. I believe joining us as well is Lindsay Pratt, director, pollutant inventories and reporting.

From the Department of Natural Resources, we have Anne-Hélène Mathey, executive director, economic analysis division, Canadian forest service and Glenn Hargrove, assistant deputy minister, Canadian forest service.

Thank you all for being here with us today.

I believe Mr. Moffet and Mr. Hargrove will each have a five-minute opening statement, so we'll go with Mr. Moffet first.

When you're ready, the floor is yours.

**Mr. John Moffet (Assistant Deputy Minister, Environmental Protection Branch, Department of the Environment):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My colleagues and I are happy to meet with you here today to discuss the commissioner's audit recommendations.

I'd like to start by acknowledging that the commissioner of environment and sustainable development plays an important accountability role for the government. Environment and Climate Change Canada appreciates the commissioner's three recommendations. We have agreed with the three recommendations and have developed action plans to address them.

Although Canada has recently made significant progress in implementing greenhouse gas regulations as well as the other measures in the 2022 emissions reduction plan, the 2016 pan-Canadian framework and the 2021 strengthening climate plan, as you discussed in the previous hour, achieving our 2030 target of 40% to 45% reductions from 2005 levels and reaching net zero by 2050 will require significant efforts to accelerate emissions reductions.

These goals are being supported by an all-of-government approach, which includes a wide range of programs and measures, as the commissioner described, from using federal procurement to transform markets to providing direct financial support to decarbonization projects, to giving the numerous investment tax credits announced in budget 2023.

For our part, Environment and Climate Change Canada is strengthening existing regulations and developing new regulations to drive additional reductions across the economy. We recently enhanced carbon pricing across Canada, for example, and brought the clean-fuel regulations into force.

We're now developing regulations focused on reducing emissions from electricity generation to move towards the goal of a net-zero electricity grid by 2035 and reducing methane and other greenhouse gas emissions from oil and gas production, from transportation and from landfills.

As we implement our current regulations and as we develop new ones, we will respond to the three recommendations from the commissioner.

In particular, we're committed to continuing to improve our ability to model the impacts of new measures and to monitor and report on the impacts of existing measures. We've committed to improving the use of sensitivity analysis in our modelling, as per the commissioner's first recommendation. Robust sensitivity analysis supports informed decisions by identifying key aspects of an issue that can have a significant influence on outcomes. Sensitivity analysis can

also help avoid an unwarranted overreliance on modelling and issues with highly uncertain outcomes. It can also improve public communications.

We've also committed to continuing to engage with the three western provinces, B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan, on the ongoing implementation of those provinces' methane regulations. Ensuring that their actions deliver expected results is a key feature of any equivalency agreement we enter into, and this information will also be important when the existing regulations expire and renewal of the equivalency agreement is discussed.

We've also committed to addressing the commissioner's third recommendation—to use the most recent measurement-based data to improve the accuracy of the oil and gas sector methane emissions data that we publish in the national emissions report. We made this commitment in our most recent NIR.

While my remarks have focused on the three specific recommendations made by the commissioner in their audit, my colleagues and I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have about these issues or about our overall regulatory agenda.

Thank you.

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Moffet.

Now we'll go to Mr. Hargrove.

The floor is yours for five minutes.

**Mr. Glenn Hargrove (Assistant Deputy Minister, Canadian Forest Service, Department of Natural Resources):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the committee for the invitation to be here at this meeting, which is taking place on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I'd also like to thank the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development for this audit on forests and climate change.

I'll start by saying we accept all but one of the report's recommendations, on which we will continue to work closely with our colleagues at Environment and Climate Change Canada. The commissioner spoke to that one recommendation, and I'll be happy to speak to that through the question period if that is of interest.

Earlier this spring, Minister Wilkinson was in North Vancouver announcing an investment that will translate into more than 37 million new trees in B.C. These trees will revitalize fire-ravaged areas. The Province of B.C. estimated that this project alone will eliminate 2.1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide between now and 2050. That's similar to taking close to half a million vehicles off our roads.

Clearly, this is good news for our environment, but it's also good news for the economy. We expect it will generate about 800 good, sustainable jobs across B.C. in labs and nurseries and in new employment opportunities for surveyors, planners and others.

As the minister has said, planting two billion trees is a marathon, not a sprint. We've engaged nurseries across the country to identify ways the program could ramp up the seedling supply chain to align with our goals and keep our principles top of mind. These are to have the right partners to plant the right trees in the right place for the right reasons.

As the owners of Crown lands and the managers of public land, the provinces and territories' participation in this program is critical. Seven of them have signed agreements in principle, outlining the importance of biodiversity, habitat restoration, carbon sequestration, permanence of forest cover and monitoring. Of those, six have also inked agreements outlining their specific tree planting contributions, which will only accelerate our pace—and there's more to come.

We have signed or are negotiating agreements that will bring us 260 million trees. I can confidently say that we will surpass our goals for planting on federal land and in urban areas. Projects on private land and those directed by indigenous peoples have also made significant strides. In fact, one in five projects was indigenous-led in our first year of planting.

On forest carbon, we'll continue to partner with Environment and Climate Change Canada to produce world-class GHG estimates, using methodology supported by more than 100 peer-reviewed research papers. We continue our efforts to stay current with the latest advancements in this field. For instance, the 2023 budget, as part of its investment in forests and forest workers, included funding to improve our forest data and reporting. Our regular discussions with forestry experts and stakeholders mean we're aware of the best available science, data and best practices, as well as where we can improve. Our modelling tools will continue to evolve, thanks to scrutiny by experts and peer-review processes.

We're proud that our reporting methods align with internationally accepted practices, as the commissioner noted. This means we produce a big picture report that collectively reflects human impacts, such as harvesting, regeneration, fire suppression and conservation. This method of reporting meets the reporting guidelines of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and reflects guidance from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

To conclude, there is no solution to climate change without forests. Nature-based climate solutions are an integral part of the solution. The good news is that interest remains high in the two bil-

lion trees program, and project applications continue to arrive and we continue to work with stakeholders and partners.

Recently, we also completed important work collaborating with indigenous governments and organizations across Canada to co-develop the framework of an indigenous funding stream expected to launch this summer. By recognizing indigenous climate change leadership, we ensure that the end result reflects diverse indigenous priorities and cultures.

There's an old proverb that goes something like this: Blessed are those who plant trees under whose shade they will never sit. I realize that many people wish to see immediate results, but I'll say again that this process is a marathon and not a sprint. Every tree planted along the way to two billion trees provides benefits for Canadians for decades.

Thank you.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Excellent. Thank you.

I want to welcome Mr. Tony Baldinelli to our committee today.

We're going to go through one round of six minutes each.

First, I have Mr. Dreeshen.

Earl, we'll go over to you.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will share some time with Mr. Baldinelli.

Mr. Hargrove, has the limiting of the hours firefighters can be on the job affected their efforts to fight fires? You are, of course, associated with the Canadian forest service, and this is what we hear. Firefighters are being pulled off because of regulations that have been put forward. Is that true?

**Mr. Glenn Hargrove:** I would expect that the regulations you're talking about are provincial jurisdiction.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Okay. We'll get to that.

You indicated that Mr. Wilkinson made an announcement that B.C. was going to push for 37 million more trees. That would be on top of the 218 million B.C. already produces, so it's not a big deal.

I know you were listening to what was mentioned in the last round. I would submit that perhaps an alternative press release NR-Can could have done back when it suggested two billion trees would have been on working closely with the provinces to assist them in increasing...to a stage of doubling the work they already do. Then they would have been the ones responsible for putting this particular natural resource on their land.

I understand it sounds pretty good when we talk about two billion trees, but it's already being done. If you can help as far as making sure we have the nurseries there to have the seedlings, that would be great, but I submit that spending a lot of time talking about how great the program is going to be.... Let's get the people out there to deal with it. The provinces have that ability, as well.

I wonder whether you could comment on the capabilities the provinces have to deal with this and how we could work together, rather than constantly saying, "Well, we have this two billion trees plan."

**Mr. Glenn Hargrove:** We recognize that provinces and territories are critical partners in the program and have been working with them throughout. We have seven agreements in principle with provinces and six contribution agreements with provinces—

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Is that to add, then, to your two billion? I mean, they still do it anyway. Is that to add to the trees?

**Mr. Glenn Hargrove:** Two billion trees is actually about a 40% increase in the number of trees planted in Canada. The idea with the program is that these are incremental to trees that would normally be planted for regulatory requirements and those sorts of things. We're working closely with the provinces to ensure there is alignment on the goals of the program—around climate, how to tap restoration and those sorts of things—and that the trees are incremental to trees that are already being planted, in recognition of the provinces' and territories' role around the ownership and management of Crown land and tree planting.

• (1710)

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Thanks. Of course, as we heard earlier, the U of A is putting in a more diverse plan for climate resilience. I think that's helpful.

I'll give my time to Mr. Baldinelli.

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and everyone, for allowing me to sit in.

The environment commissioner indicated the departments' difficulties in measuring and meeting the targets and promises the government has set, yet we continue to raise targets. We can't meet our current targets. You mentioned the net-zero electrical grid by 2035. How do we reconcile that with the fact that several provinces have said they're unable to meet 2035? Ontario's independent electricity system operator, in December, put out a report saying that to get a net-zero grid by 2050, it will be \$400 billion in the province of Ontario alone. You're going to need six times the 14,000 workers who exist there.

How does the government work with the provinces to establish that? For example, in 2025, if Pickering is taken offline, that's 15% of the grid. Nuclear in Ontario is about 60% of the total province. If you take 15% off the grid, how does Ontario replace it? It's proba-

bly through natural gas. There has to be a way to work together, because there's no way, right now, under these goals, that I see a net-zero electrical grid by 2035.

**Mr. John Moffet:** I'm sorry. Do you have a question?

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** How can the government work with the provinces to achieve it?

**Mr. John Moffet:** Well, it—

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** How are you going to work with the provinces to do that?

**Mr. John Moffet:** The federal government, from the outset of its addressing the climate and biodiversity crisis, has acknowledged that these are areas of shared jurisdiction that require efforts by all Canadians and all levels of government.

The federal government has some jurisdiction over some of these issues. For example, we will be developing a clean electricity regulation. We've provided investment tax credits to enable provincial utilities and private sector electricity generators to take advantage of those in order to reduce the capital costs of investing in clean electricity. It will be up to provinces to make those decisions about how to allocate those costs.

The reality is, however, that, as the economy decarbonizes, all jurisdictions, including Ontario, are going to have to invest a lot of money in increasing electricity generation, regardless of whether that generation is clean or not.

**The Chair:** We're out of time on this one.

We're going to Mr. Blois, who has six minutes.

**Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for ECCC.

I have report number 5 in my hand from the commissioner, and I'm referencing paragraph 5.23 where the commissioner talks about the fact that the department did not model purchasers' behaviours. It goes on to say that it did not model the impact of price changes.

Can you briefly describe to this committee the purchasers' behaviours whether or not on regulations around the emission intensity for vehicles, or perhaps on the retail fuel charge, what modelling goes in with regard to behavioural change? It's all about changing behaviour either for companies or for consumers. Can you briefly describe what that would look like for us?

**Mr. John Moffet:** I'll start, and then I'll turn to my colleague Mr. Hermanutz, who's responsible for modelling.

Just to be clear, this is not about carbon pricing.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** No, but I'm going to build my question, I guess, on the purchasing model.

Explain what this does relate to in the commissioner's report, and then I'll segue to carbon pricing.

**Mr. John Moffet:** The commissioner's report relates to regulations, which do not regulate consumer behaviour. They regulate the kind of vehicle fleet that each vehicle manufacturer can sell in Canada.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Mr. Moffet, what I'm hearing from you is that you don't feel the purchaser's behaviour is relevant to this element at all. You don't really necessarily agree with the commissioner's report in that sense then, do you?

**Mr. John Moffet:** I didn't say that.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Okay. What are you saying then?

They're saying it's important, and you're saying this is about the type of stringency on the auto manufacturers. The commissioner is obviously talking about the inadequacy of the department in terms of behavioural impacts on consumers, and you're saying there's no context. Why is that not important?

• (1715)

**Mr. John Moffet:** I was trying to describe what these regulations do. These regulations establish limits on the fleet-wide emissions that each manufacturer can provide in Canada and require those to be reduced.

Coming back to one of the themes that you've heard both from the commissioner and from us, the approach to decarbonizing the economy has to include a suite of measures in order to influence producer decisions and consumer decisions. These regulations regulate what gets produced. What gets purchased is influenced by the carbon price.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Right, but wouldn't the regulations also have a downstream impact on the cost of vehicles as well? Is that what the commissioner is trying to get at in this report in terms of that modelling behaviour?

**Mr. John Moffet:** No, I think what the commissioner is getting at is when we do a regulatory impact analysis statement, we attempt to identify the impact of a regulation not only on its intended objective here of reducing emissions but also on costs and benefits. That impact in turn—

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Mr. Moffet, I—

**Mr. John Moffet:** Would you like me to answer to your question?

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Well, I only have so much time, so I want to get to the point.

We'll talk about carbon pricing then.

Mr. Hermanutz, you're the one who's involved in the modelling on behaviour. I'm curious, on the retail fuel charge, what type of behavioural data goes into that? What assumptions are built into EC-CC's model for the retail fuel price on carbon?

**Mr. Derek Hermanutz (Director General, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of the Environment):** Is that in the context of this analysis that you're referring to?

**Mr. Kody Blois:** The commissioner's raising concerns about the department's element to consider the purchasers' behaviours, which

of course are consumers. I'm going a little bit broader and trying to understand the department's element of how you model behaviours for consumers whether it's through regulations or through other types of mechanisms of the hundred that are mentioned in this.

What do you take into consideration for household behaviours as they relate to the policies that you're adopting?

**Mr. Derek Hermanutz:** There are different types of analyses that we do and different types of models that we use for the different types of analyses.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** I'm a rural member of Parliament. For rural residents, what types of assumptions do you build in with regard to changed behaviour as it relates to the policies that you're developing?

**Mr. Derek Hermanutz:** When we publish draft regulations and then the final regulations in a regulatory impact analysis statement, we do a cost-benefit analysis, which is a specific type of economic analysis following the cabinet directive. Often, that analysis will be what we could call a static analysis. It wouldn't necessarily take into account the second-order effects that I think you're referring to.

Within a RIAS, we can also do, with a different type of modelling, distributional analysis. When we use those models to look at the overall climate plan—

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Can I just ask this: Do you see a lived difference between urban and rural Canada vis-à-vis the impact of some of these policies? Is that built into your model, yes or no?

**Mr. Derek Hermanutz:** I don't think it's built into our model.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Thank you.

On clean fuel standards... I'm a member of Parliament from Atlantic Canada. We've been hearing concerns from the four Atlantic premiers. Does the department have a sense of the cost? Obviously, the commissioner criticized the delay. I expect the department had a rationale for why it was trying to work, but do you have a sense of what the cost is going to be? We've heard from the PBO that it's 17¢ a litre. Do you know what that will be for Atlantic Canada?

**Mr. Derek Hermanutz:** I don't have that number in my head, but it's in the cost-benefit analysis. I can provide that to you.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Is the expectation of what the costs will be publicly available by region?

**Mr. Derek Hermanutz:** The costs and benefits are, I believe, in the public document.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Okay.

**The Chair:** We're out of time.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Could we have the price of the tax, as well?

**Mr. Derek Hermanutz:** I'd be happy to share that with the committee

**The Chair:** If we could receive that through the clerk, that would be useful.

**Mr. Derek Hermanutz:** I'd be happy to share that with the committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're going next to Mr. Simard.

[Translation]

Over to you, Mr. Simard, for six minutes.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Hargrove, according to a Natural Resources Canada document on the state of Canada's forests, between 500 and 600 million trees were planted annually on public lands over a period of 10 years, specifically from 2010 to 2020. If I do some quick math, that works out to 5.5 billion trees planted over 10 years, probably largely by industry. That means it is achievable and it is possible to plant two billion trees per year.

The government may have gone about this the wrong way, unfortunately. I say that because of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development's report, of course, but also because I have the feeling that you didn't seek out the expertise you needed to successfully plant two billion trees.

From the get-go, I had the feeling that this was more about having a political slogan than following through on a genuine desire, because I started talking to people about it in 2020. My colleague Paul Lefebvre was here then. I met with people. If there's anywhere that the forestry sector is important, it's definitely Quebec, especially my region. I met with people with the kind of expertise this program calls for, people who wanted to assist the department. That was in 2020. Those people got a call from you four or five weeks ago. From 2020 up to four or five weeks ago, people with the expertise necessary to plant two billion trees never heard from you even though they tried reaching out to build a network. Why did it take so long?

• (1720)

[English]

**Mr. Glenn Hargrove:** First of all, I'd say that we have consulted a range of experts. We also have deep expertise within the department. We're a science-based organization. For all of the projects, we have an expert panel that includes internal and external experts. We look for a range of expertise so that this expertise can be brought to bear on the projects.

With regard to the earlier part of your question around the number of trees that are planted in Canada, it's true that two billion trees over a decade is about a 40% increase. That means a significant ramp-up in the supply chain—

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Simard:** I understand. You said that earlier. Forgive me for cutting you off, Mr. Hargrove, but I don't have a lot of time.

Would you agree to provide to the committee the list of experts you consulted with for the two billion trees program? I'm talking about the people whom you felt had the necessary expertise and

with whom you worked. The expertise I am talking about comes from a university research chair.

Would you agree to provide the committee with the list of agents to whom you delegated the planting of the two billion trees? I find it odd that you didn't sign agreements with the provinces for all that tree planting. That's a pretty big problem if you are trying to achieve the target since you have to go through the provinces.

I never saw any plans as to the types of trees recommended. Are you going with wind breaks? Are you doing reforestation? Are you doing afforestation? I never saw any plans from the department. There seems to be a lot of improvising going on.

Can you tell us when the strategy to plant the two billion trees was actually implemented? I want to know how long after the government made the commitment in 2019 that the first trees were planted. What was the rationale behind your approach? Who did you consult with? Would you be able to provide us with those departmental documents?

[English]

**Mr. Glenn Hargrove:** Certainly. I'd be very happy to provide a document that lays out the planning and also a list of experts whom we've consulted through the expert panels and through our advisory committee.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Simard:** To your knowledge, did you consult with experts from every province? You're indicating that you did. That's great.

In his report, the commissioner states that in order to reach the target and plant two billion trees, you need to make significant changes. Otherwise, it's unlikely that the program will succeed. Can you tell me whether you have put any measures in place to address that point since the report came out?

[English]

**Mr. Glenn Hargrove:** In the commissioner's report, and to be fair, the report looked at a slice in time early on in a program that is a 10-year program, a lot of what the commissioner was talking about was in terms of ramping up efforts. As the commissioner mentioned, since the time and scope of his report, we now have seven agreements in principle with the provinces and territories. We have six contribution agreements with them.

We're now up to over 260 million trees committed in agreements or under negotiation. There have been a lot of efforts. We've really focused on making sure that we are working with the right people, that we are taking the right steps to set the program up for long-term success.

• (1725)

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Simard:** I'd like to conclude on this.

[English]

**The Chair:** We're finished now. We're out of time.

We're going to Mr. Angus for his final six minutes.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Thank you, Chair.

My frustration is that the planet is on fire, and yet the environment commissioner gives us a report that says that the list of failures grows longer, yet again. We can't continue to go from failure to failure. We need action and results, not just more targets and plans.

Mr. Moffet, it's a long list of devastating failures on the part of the government to address the climate catastrophe that's unfolding.

How do you explain the 399 progress reports that Environment and Climate Change Canada was required to produce? It only completed one. Is this not that important, or do you not have the resources to get this work done?

**Mr. John Moffet:** I apologize. I'm not sure what 399 reports you're referring to.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** He said, "Of the 399 progress reports that Environment and Climate Change Canada was required to produce, it had completed only 1." Are you not aware of that?

**Mr. John Moffet:** I think he was referring to reports that he expected with respect to the methane equivalency agreements, which would not be 399. He was expecting us to produce one per year, and we produced one so far over the three years that the agreements have been in place.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Okay. That's not how I read it, but we'll carry on.

He says that regulations are an important way of achieving Canada's emission reduction targets. However, without comprehensive impact information, the government simply doesn't know whether it's using the right tools or not.

How are we to tell the Canadian public not to worry, that in the midst of this climate catastrophe that's unfolding, the government is on track to meet its reduction targets for 2030?

Is that just performative? Is that just going to be a good Instagram quote, or do you actually have the tools to tell the government whether or not you're going to get there?

**Mr. John Moffet:** There are a couple of answers to that.

First, we do attempt to project the impact of each regulation that we develop. We also report on overall emissions from the economy, which are a result of a variety of inputs. The country has, for the first time, reduced its total emissions. The best place for Canadians to look at that is at the emissions reduction plan that was produced last year, and then to hold the government accountable for implementing all of the measures in that plan, and to have the government report on an annual basis whether our emissions are going up or down. The emissions are finally starting to trend in the right direction.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Well, certainly COVID helped. We're not sure if your emissions plan helped.

What he's saying is that you don't actually know if you're using the right tools. This is a hope and a prayer, which is not going to help our planet as it burns.

I do want to ask this, being that Canada is the only G7 country where emissions have risen and have been much more off track with the rest of the G7. We know that the government meets regu-

larly with big oil. We're seeing reports that Suncor helped write the first draft of the government carbon emissions plan.

Isn't that like putting Dracula in charge of the blood bank?

• (1730)

**Mr. John Moffet:** I'm not aware of oil and gas sector officials writing our plan. Certainly none have contributed to drafting a single word of any regulation for which I'm responsible.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** How many lobbying meetings would there have been? Would you say that there have been meetings with Suncor and other officials in terms of the emissions plan?

It has failed and the reporting that we've had is that they've been meeting. We do know that the clean fuel standards are delayed by three years, so either, as the environment commissioner says, the alarm bells are ringing or it's business as usual in the department.

Have there been meetings with representatives from the oil lobby on these issues and how many?

**Mr. John Moffet:** I can follow up with the number of meetings. I can tell you that I am among the most frequently met with officials in the Government of Canada.

My door is open. I meet regularly with oil and gas industry. I meet regularly with environmental NGOs. I meet regularly with environmental justice representatives. I meet regularly with all levels of government—

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** They've had over 6,000 meetings with the government. That's more than ordinary people. That's serious inside information.

Can you tell us what influence oil and gas have when the government delays its clean fuel regs and when the government continues to not have an emissions cap where it's been promised? Somebody—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I'm going to stop the clock. There are about 10 seconds left. I'm getting called for a point of order here.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Mr. Chair, I appreciate the line of questioning. I just asked some relatively tough questions of our officials as well. I don't know that the way Mr. Angus is framing these questions.... He can ask them in the House of Commons to the elected officials, but not to our public servants in the way that he's framing them. I think it's a disingenuous line of questioning.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Actually, he's the one in these meetings. This is the Liberals trying to interfere with my line of questioning. I want to get an answer.

He meets with them. He told us he meets with them. How often does he meet with them?

**The Chair:** Mr. Angus, you have 10 seconds left. If there is a final question you wanted to put there, then I would like to go to the officials to allow them the opportunity to respond.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I will just end on this.

We know that he's had over 6,000 meetings with big oil. We know the Liberals just tried to stop me asking that question. We know that Mr. Moffet is one of the key people meeting with big oil. We want to know, and the public has a right to know, how that is influencing the emissions—

**The Chair:** Your time's up, Charlie.

I'll give the officials an opportunity to respond if they would like.

**Mr. John Moffet:** I can confidently respond that no sector, including the oil and gas sector, was responsible for the time it took us to develop the clean fuel regulations.

We responded to the commissioner about the reason these regulations took longer than the average regulations. There were a num-

ber of factors there, primarily that it was the first life cycle regulation ever developed in Canada. Then a number of other measures were introduced by the government that we were required to take into account so that we could put in place a regulation that would be durable and based on which.... We've seen billions of dollars of investment in clean fuel as a result of the final text of the regulations.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Colleagues, we do have resources until about 5:50, given the late start, but I do have a budget for today that I need to get passed. I have also been asked by Mr. Morrice if we would give him, through unanimous consent, two and a half minutes.

**An hon. member:** No.

**The Chair:** That's not accepted.

I'll thank the witnesses for being here.

Before we adjourn, there was a budget that was circulated for today's meeting. I'd simply like to get this passed. Is everybody in favour of the budget as presented?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Folks, I had put an in camera session, but that can be carried forward to Friday. The intention is that we'll deal with that at the end of the meeting after we go through the report that we're going to be looking at on federal subsidies.

With that, thank you to our witnesses for being here.

Colleagues, we're adjourned until Friday.

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