

*Government Orders*

This is a step forward in making sustainable development more than a concept. The departmental strategies will assist the auditor general and the commissioner in not only monitoring government for preparation of their reports to Parliament but they will also serve as benchmarks by which the commissioner and the auditor general can assess each government department's performance in making that shift to sustainable development.

By the way, the auditor general and the stakeholders have already indicated the need for such benchmarks. We need to show where progress is being made and if not, why not. This is not a one shot affair to be undertaken with fanfare and then quickly forgotten. Every three years each department must update its sustainable development strategy and its minister must table the update in Parliament.

[Translation]

Thanks to these amendments, Canadians will be able to play their part by ensuring that the government is responsive to expectations with respect to the environment. The Auditor General will have the authority to receive petitions from the public about environmental matters and forward them to the appropriate minister.

The number and purpose of petitions received by ministers and the status of these files will be monitored, and the commissioner will report on the results obtained to the House of Commons.

[English]

The amendments also require the commissioner to report every year to the House of Commons on behalf of the auditor general. These reports can focus on anything related to sustainable development, whatever the commissioner feels important enough to bring to the attention of the House. In particular, the commissioner's annual report will show how far governments and departments have gone in meeting the objectives and expectations they have established in their strategies.

However, the annual report will not be the only report to the House of Commons on our environmental performance.

• (1230)

These amendments will ensure that environmental observations continue to be included in the auditor general's report as well. That is important because the auditor general's reports are more general in scope and they will include considerations of effectiveness and the environment. One of the commissioner's duties will be to assist the auditor general in preparing aspects of those reports referring to the environment and sustainable development.

We are wasting no time in moving on our obligations under the Auditor General Act because we are committed to thinking green and ensuring that green government is a central component of the decisions we make as a society. Our action plan accelerating the shift to green practices in government can be reflected in the work of Environment Canada. That plan has five points: green procurement policies that emphasize reduction, reuse, and purchase of environmentally sound products; managing the department's car fleets to reduce emissions by 30 per cent within the next five years; making zero waste a target in our offices; improving energy efficiency and conserving water specifically by auditing the use of water in all Environment Canada buildings.

[Translation]

We have already had some major successes. At Environment Canada headquarters in Quebec City, in Sainte-Foy for instance, water consumption dropped by 9.6 million litres annually following implementation of effective ways to save water. This is a good indication of the economic potential of sustainable development.

[English]

In Hamilton—Wentworth at the Canada Centre for Inland Waters, which is in the city of Burlington, energy efficiency improvements are lowering carbon dioxide emissions by 5,900 tonnes. That is the equivalent per year to the emissions from 1,500 cars. That means we are saving enough energy to heat 525 homes a year.

Another example is the new guidebook entitled "A Guide to Green Government", which is signed by the Prime Minister and all cabinet ministers, to help federal departments make sustainable development their business. It will serve as ground breaking information for the commissioner when she or he reports on the success departments are having in integrating sustainable development practices. They already have "A Guide to Green Government" signed by the Prime Minister of Canada because he believes that sustainable development is a responsibility we all share. It is a responsibility shared by Canadians.

When governments prepare our strategies we must act in an open and transparent way. We must include groups with expertise, like the national round table on the environment and the economy.

[Translation]

Another example illustrates the fact that we take our responsibilities seriously. The Minister of Finance and I received a report from a multiparty task force that was asked to identify obstacles to sound environmental practices as well as effective ways to use economic instruments.

In the last budget, the government followed the short-term recommendations of the task force, and we hope it will do more