



### Where I work Mona Nemer

**W**alking re-energizes me when I have difficult decisions to make. I have a lot of them: as chief science adviser to the Canadian government, my role involves convening experts from multiple disciplines to offer guidance on the complex issues facing society, from renewable energies to the hazards of microplastics.

Near our office, there is a path along the Ottawa River that goes by the Parliament and Supreme Court buildings and makes a circuit, with Ottawa on one side and Gatineau, Quebec, on the other. Its natural beauty helps me to reflect on complex issues and on unexpected scientific findings.

In May 2018, the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard asked me to convene an advisory panel on how to use science better in decisions regarding aquaculture sites and regulations. I assembled a team, but there were collisions at the start because participants embraced opposing views on the value and safety of fish farming. After two days of intense discussions, I wasn't sure we could reach

a consensus. I took a walk by the water and asked myself: "What is it we all have in common and that we all value?" I realized that everybody values the environment and wants what's best for Canadians.

During my walk, I developed a strategy to establish our common ground by asking team members to identify what was most valuable to them. We eventually recommended, in part, that the government use best scientific practices, including local and Indigenous knowledge, adopt an open-science approach and prioritize regional ecosystem differences in making decisions.

The plants, flowers, trees and shrubs along the path, and the changing colours of the leaves, are chemistry and biology in action. You also come to the locks of the historic Rideau Canal. This confluence of science and technology reminds me how far we've come – and of the importance of science for providing solutions for society.

**Mona Nemer** is a molecular biologist and Chief Science Advisor of Canada. **Interview by Kendall Powell.**

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