

The report contains some valuable contributions to the public debate concerning environmentally sustainable energy policy. The most important of these include the following:

1. Energy efficiency and conservation must be a major focus.

The report accurately states that "Virtually every industry witness who appeared before the Committee listed improved energy efficiency and/or conservation as one of the principal components of the strategy for meeting environmental challenges." (p. 123) Pursuit of this approach is entirely realistic technically since "many of the most important and helpful energy efficiency technologies are well-developed, well-established and fairly simple to incorporate into current commercial and industrial plant." (p. 129-130) Moreover, "pursuing effective energy conservation and efficiency measures would make Canadian business more competitive." (p. 33)

The report makes several important proposals designed to spur energy conservation and efficiency. These include proposals to increase federal government research, development, and demonstration (p. 46), set specific energy consumption reduction targets (Recommendation #23), assign a "higher priority" to energy conservation and efficiency (Recommendation #26), take "all possible action to again reverse the trend and start back on the road to improved (new motor vehicle) fuel efficiency" (p. 128), and examine innovative taxation and incentive ideas (p. 56). Specific proposals for legislation would have been helpful, but the urging of action in principal is welcome.

2. Alternative sources of energy should also receive much greater federal government support.

Portions of the report clearly reflect Members' keen interest in alternative energy sources. For example: "The Committee is of the opinion that, principally for environmental reasons but for other economic and commercial reasons as well, solar energy will be the energy source of choice in the future. The implications for technology development and marketing are little short of revolutionary" (p. 112). Similarly, the report states that "(w)ind energy is recognized as one of the most environmentally benign technologies capable of generating utility grade electricity" (p. 103). "A more balanced playing field, in which all costs, including social and environmental costs, are taken into account would allow wind energy to play a significantly greater role in Canada" (p. 105). However, the report correctly states that "(t)o be successful, the wind energy industry would require a champion in government" (p. 105). The same can safely be said for Canada's nascent solar energy industries.

The report recognizes the contribution that biomass energy can play in reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Biomass fuels are often "not a net contributor to the greenhouse effect" because they "can be seen as 'backing out' or replacing fossil fuels which . . . otherwise would have been used . . . (thus reducing) the amount of new carbon taken up from the lithosphere and deposited in the atmosphere" (p. 93).

The Committee enthusiastically endorses two new potentially renewable energy technologies, stating: "The Committee believes that Canada could derive significant benefit in the long term if . . . the fuel cell being developed by Ballard Industries, and the photovoltaic/electrolysis system of Electrolyser Corp. . . . were commercialized in a timely manner." (p. 115) As well,