

14. Could the process be more public?

The federal Cabinet approved Canada's current military goods export control policy in 1986, and parliamentary committees have reviewed it since then. The policy builds on several decades of experience in this field and is closely aligned with similar policies in other countries.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs is responsible to Parliament for the operation of the Export and Import Permits Act. The Minister produces an annual report on exports of controlled military goods and presents it to Parliament and Canadians. No country reports in more detail on such exports.

Parliament and its committees review Canada's defence production and military export policies periodically. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has conducted similar reviews. These processes always involve consultation with interested parties such as non-governmental organizations with an interest in international issues and businesses that produce military and dual-use goods. In fact, this booklet is an initiative that resulted from the assessment that took place in 1997.

Individual export applications are not subject to public review for two reasons. First, companies are often required to submit confidential product and trade information with their applications. Were this information to become public, it could put at risk the companies' commercial dealings and proprietary technologies, even in non-military markets.

Second, important foreign policy considerations are at stake. Many assessments draw on highly classified intelligence information. Public release of this information could harm Canada's international relations, threaten the safety of confidential sources and provide other countries with information that is not in Canada's best interests to release. A public airing of some confidential Canadian views might also lead another country to break off shared initiatives that Canada is advancing to improve human rights, peacekeeping or other aspects of democratization in that country.