The Bureau of Economic and Scientific Affairs co-ordinates and develops policy and initiatives touching on broader questions of major significance for Canada in international economic, scientific and environmental affairs. It comprises four divisions: Aid and Development; Commercial Policy; Transport, Communications and Energy; and Scientific Relations and Environmental Problems.

The Aid and Development Division provides a focus for co-ordination of departmental views on aid-policy questions and a channel for consultation with the Canadian International Development Agency and with other government departments and agencies that have an interest in particular aspects of development-assistance activities, both bilateral and multilateral. The division also has responsibilities for special measures designed to promote the trading interests of developing countries, and provides liaison with the Export Development Corporation and the International Development Research Centre. It supplies representation at relevant interdepartmental consultations on aid questions and helps to staff Canadian delegations to international aid conferences, such as the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the United Nations Development Program.

With the exception of the specific areas noted below, the Commercial Policy Division has responsibility for general international economic, trade and financial policy questions, including Canada's bilateral relations in these fields with all countries, and Canadian participation in international organizations and multilateral arrangements concerned with such matters. The exceptions referred to above are bilateral and multilateral foreign aid and development, and energy, transport and communications questions.

The Transport, Communications and Energy Division is primarily concerned with the external-affairs aspects of transport, communications and energy, including bilateral and multilateral questions relating to atomic energy, bilateral civil aviation agreements, INTELSAT and other communications subjects, matters related to the export of strategic materials, and bilateral energy relations with the United States. This division has responsibility for matters concerning the International Atomic Energy Agency; the entry into force of the Treaty for the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons has given added importance to the Agency's safeguarding role.

The Scientific Relations and Environmental Problems Division was established in 1970 as a reflection of the growing importance of science, technology and environmental problems in the conduct of international relations. This organizational change enables the Department to meet new responsibilities, and has concentrated existing activities, hitherto dispersed, in one unit. The division is concerned with international, largely intergovernmental, aspects of activities predominantly scientific and technical in nature, or relating to the preservation of the human environment. Divisional responsibilities also include the following: the conduct of scientific relations with other countries and international organizations, including the negotiation of agreements pertaining to scientific, technological and environmental matters; the provision of advice on scientific questions with foreign-policy implications; liaison and co-ordination with science-based departments and agencies; and the administrative direction of official scientific representation abroad.