

Building Momentum

Sustainable Development in Canada

Managing economic development and human growth without destroying the life-support systems of our planet demands of Canadians a fundamental shift in values and public policy. We must aspire to be less wasteful of our natural and human resources, to place greater worth on the welfare of future generations, and to take pride in maintaining a healthy, productive Earth.

—*Creating Opportunity*

INTRODUCTION

In 1983, the United Nations General Assembly established the World Commission on Environment and Development. Its 1987 report, *Our Common Future*, popularized the concept of sustainable development—defining it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Known also as the Brundtland report, it recognized that the concept does imply limits—not absolute limits, but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. In 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the global community committed itself to the goal of sustainable development.

Canada covers 7 percent of the world's landmass and is bounded by three oceans. As stewards of a vast and beautiful land, Canadians are aware of their environmental responsibilities. In the last twenty-five years, Canada's population has grown from 21.5 million to over 30 million. Our economy has increased more than twofold, with the gross

domestic product at approximately \$800 billion (1996 dollars). This land and its people have enabled Canada to become one of the most economically prosperous countries in the world. As we have grown so has our understanding of the linkages between the environment, the economy, and social development. We continue to build momentum toward sustainable development.



Photo credit: Environment Canada

Protecting species such as the endangered Peary caribou in Canada's High Arctic involves many approaches.