

converging social, economic, and environmental issues, governments can demonstrate the sustainable development approach to decision making to individuals, businesses, and interest groups. Governments are also in a unique position to gather, interpret, and distribute information for decision making and to lead by example, by improving their own environmental performance.

The Government of Canada takes an integrated approach to planning and decision making for sustainable development, involving full-cost accounting, environmental assessment, and ecosystem management. It bases its decisions on the best science and analysis available, seeking to embody the visions and expectations of Canadians and working in partnership with individuals, groups, and other governments. It uses a variety of policy measures, including voluntary approaches, information and awareness tools, and economic instruments, to achieve its sustainable development goals.

In 1997, federal departments were required for the first time to table in Parliament a three-year sustainable development strategy that outlined departmental objectives and an action plan for integrating sustainable development into policies, programs, and operations. These strategies are critical for advancing the Government of Canada's sustainable development agenda and for measuring progress against it. The strategies must be comprehensive, results-oriented, and developed in consultation with clients and other stakeholders. Departments have now assessed their progress against their performance objectives and are currently developing the next generation of sustainable development strategies.

Two other important federal policy initiatives support sustainable development. The National Sustainable Development Policy Research Program, targeted at both government and academia, seeks to build on the foundation of knowledge, increase the capacity for policy research, and generate a network of experts in sustainable development. Strategic environmental assessment is a policy assessment tool that requires federal departments to consider the environmental implications of all policy, plan, and program proposals.

Canada's First National Climate Change Business Plan

A good illustration of Canada's commitment to sustainable development is the recently announced First National Climate Change Business Plan. The measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions outlined in the plan set the course for action in all sectors of the Canadian economy, encourage action by industry and consumers, and lay the groundwork for long-term behavioural, technological, and economic change. When fully implemented, the plan will take Canada one third of the way to achieving the target established in the Kyoto Protocol and help Canada to become a leader in sustainable development, particularly in the production and use of all forms of energy.

NEEDED INFORMATION

What kind of information is needed to support our decisions for sustainable development? Decision makers at all levels need information on the current performance of any given system, why it is behaving as it is, what performance level is satisfactory, and