

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Participants recognize that Canada enjoys a high standard of living and a relatively strong economy in comparison to other industrialized nations. There is a strong view, however, that Canada is falling behind as the world becomes more competitive. Focus group participants attribute this to a number of factors, including the size of our population, the perceived excessive burden of taxes in Canada, the deficit, and the difficulty of competing with a country the size of the United States.
- All participants recognized the importance of competitiveness and trade to Canada's economic well-being. While moderate opponents to the Canada - U.S. Free Trade Agreement were less inclined to place as strong an emphasis on competitiveness, the majority recognized that in order to build our economy, exports and competitiveness would be key. Only a small minority of participants in all groups reported that Canada should concentrate its efforts on our internal markets and attempt self-sufficiency.
- While not pervasive, there was a relatively strong view among most participants that the world was becoming increasingly competitive and that nations were forming trading blocs. The Pacific Rim and the European Community were cited specifically. There was general agreement (more pronounced among moderate FTA supporters) that a North American bloc would not only be necessary but potentially beneficial.
- While all participants agreed that Canada's major exports consisted of natural resources and raw materials, there was general agreement that Canada would have to expand its export portfolio, if it was to remain competitive. Focus group participants believed that there were significant opportunities for expanding our manufacturing base domestically, processing the raw materials that Canada has in abundance and expanding opportunities in high-technology.

