

Canadian Priorities:

For Canada, the initial approach to the issues was largely defensive but not in a negative sense. Given the importance of our natural resource sector, the focus was on concerns over efforts by other countries to determine Canadian domestic environmental policies through trade measures. The dangers of protectionist abuse of environmental policies were clear. The challenges faced by the forest products sector to adapt to changed market requirements, whether these be with respect to harvesting practices, bleaching processes, or recycled content were the clearest examples. Canada had good reason to approach the discussions with some caution.

Within the Canadian federal government, there were a range of views. Environment Canada had been pro-active as operator of Canada's ecolabelling program, Environmental Choice, and in the negotiation of international environmental agreements (MEAs) in cooperation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Industry Canada was obviously less enthusiastic and cited the ban under the Basel Convention on recyclables, the European Union ecolabelling program, and some domestic environmental policies as reasons for taking a more defensive posture. However, it viewed the discussions as an opportunity to develop disciplines on the use of trade measures to achieve environmental objectives. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Natural Resources Canada also reinforced this defensive orientation, as did the trade policy specialists within the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Canada, however, had no grand design for the CTE. The approach to policy and negotiating position development was incremental and reflected increased interdepartmental understanding of the issue. While there was a general objective to "do something" on ecolabelling that would make ecolabelling programs subject to the disciplines of the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement, it was unclear about how this could be done and what trade-offs might be required, both internally and in the CTE. The issue of MEAs was a lower priority; at one point of time, this was viewed as merely providing negotiating leverage for ecolabelling rather than a horizontal issue of real importance to Canada.

In 1992, Canada also helped establish a group of like-minded countries, the Point du Jour group, that shared this initial defensive orientation, as a means to share information, compare notes and, where possible, coordinate interventions. While information sharing remained a valuable role throughout, the coordination occurred mainly during the time of the EMIT group and the first stage of deliberations of the CTE. As the CTE moved into the negotiation phase in the lead-up to the Singapore Ministerial, positions diverged and the Point du jour role was limited to information sharing.

The technical and overly abstract nature of the trade and environment interface, particularly with respect to MEAs where the absence of actual trade disputes was cited as proof that this issue was more theoretical than real, made better understanding of the issues within government more difficult. While the political importance of the issue, both domestically and for the WTO, was recognized at all levels within the Department, the complex nature of the substantive issues, in the absence of a negotiation with real immediate Canadian interests at