

II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

A. PURPOSE OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The Government is committed to integrating environmental considerations into the policy-making process in pursuit of sustainable development. Because a comprehensive trade agreement such as the Uruguay Round package is a significant policy development, the potential positive and negative environmental implications need to be examined.

Long-utilized as a means to improve planning and decision making related to projects, environmental review is now recognized as an important tool for ensuring that environmental concerns are given careful consideration in the formulation of government policies.

The nature of policies differs substantially from that of projects. Policies are frameworks that set guidelines or parameters within which subsequent project decisions are made and actions are taken. Policies can rarely be subjected to the same type of quantitative and predictive analyses that are associated with the assessment of projects, such as the construction of a dam, a mine or a factory. The potential environmental impacts of certain policies are difficult to appraise and fully anticipate in advance of their implementation. However, while the environmental review of policies differs from that of projects, the fundamental purpose remains the same—to ensure the systematic consideration of environmental factors in decision making.

B. FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY REVIEW

Canada's environmental assessment process requires that, prior to their final consideration by Cabinet, policy or program proposals be examined for their environmental implications. In the event that a proposal could have environmental effects, a statement on those effects is included in the documentation prepared for consideration by ministers.

Sponsoring departments, in this case DFAIT, are responsible for ensuring the review of environmentally relevant policy and program proposals. Where appropriate, ministers are responsible for determining the content and extent of a public statement on the potential environmental implications of the initiative.