

## CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL TRADE BUSINESS PLAN (ITBP)

By Marie A. Stamp

*...an interview with Brian Baker, Director TOC*

The ITBP, says Brian Baker, is as much a process as it is a publication. As a "process", the ITBP is a mechanism for bringing together 17 federal departments and agencies with a role in international business development: this means coordinating resources amounting to 1,600 PYs and \$500 M in O&M and contributions. "It only makes sense," he says. These days, downsizing has left managers with the realization that they can't do everything for themselves; coordination and cooperation are indispensable in getting value for our money.

Sounds reasonable enough, but 17 federal partners? I asked Brian to explain TOC's role, and how such a broad consultative process is managed.

Brian explained that, for the ITBP, TOC's role is as a "secretariat". The Plan is managed by an interdepartmental steering committee with members from DFAIT, Industry Canada and Agriculture Canada. He agreed that this kind of coordination is not exactly a straightforward meeting of minds. Committee meetings are "lively", he says with a wry smile, and proceeds to explain that difficult, even controversial questions are a necessary part of the rationalization that must take place. "The discussions are fascinating," he insists.

The process begins with a strategic overview of the framework of government policy and direction within which business will operate. Not surprisingly, there will be a lot of input from the Chrétien government's "Red Book" this time around. Consultation with industry is managed through associations and Sector Advisory Groups on International Trade, also known as SAGITs. The next step is to examine the opportunities and challenges for Canadian business in the international marketplace, and develop sector strategies. When the sector

strategies are ready, International Trade Centres in the regions receive drafts, as do our provincial/territorial partners and posts abroad. They can then provide additional input, and include additional events. The whole process is gearing toward even closer working relationships with industry and provinces. Baker suspects that some provinces will be full-fledged participants in the 95-96

ITBP, and that this could also mean a heightened role for ITCs.

The ITBP is of course also a publication, jam-packed with useful information for the Canadian

business community. A number of improvements to both the process and the publication are in the offing, to provide businesses with the information they need in a readily-available format. Ideas include more concise, sector-specific publications, and a "dial-in" fax-link connection.

Another improvement will be in moving the whole planning cycle ahead next year, in harmony with the planning cycle of our posts abroad. Posts will be asked for inputs earlier, ensuring that they are fully brought into the consultative process, and will only be tasked once for this information.

As long as the ITBP is evolving, Brian Baker believes it's doing what it's supposed to do. Responsiveness will be a permanent feature, as will the goal of optimum "cohesiveness" among all programs and players, a point Brian likes to emphasize. "There is evidence the plan is working," says Brian, "especially in the elimination of duplication, and in the dialogue that is developing among the partners".

Brian joined the TCS while in St. John's in 1970, and has served since then in New York, India, Israel, Sweden and Australia. This is his 5th year back in Ottawa, where he has been Director at TOC -Trade Planning and Coordination- since its creation in August 93.

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