VII. CONCLUSIONS

The major purpose of this focus group research on Canadians' attitudes towards Canada-U.S. free trade was to explore in more detail the underlying feelings and concerns of Canadians about free trade overall, as well as about particular aspects of Canadian public opinion revealed in the results from the nation-wide telephone survey conducted by Decima Research in June. Several particular issues were of interest in this context. These include, among others:

1. Possible reasons for Ontarians' relatively more skeptical views on the free trade initiative than those of other Canadians;

2. Why, as revealed in the June survey results, most Canadians other than those in British Columbia and Newfoundland do not move from an observation of increased U.S. protectionism and a recognition of its detrimental impact on the Canadian economy to embrace Canada-U.S. free trade as a solution to this problem; and

3. The reasons underlying the views of Canadians from different regions about the likely effect of free trade upon industry sectors of special importance to the economy of their province and region.

The following are the main conclusions and implications for issue management and public communications stemming from the focus group research.

1. Information and consultation

As noted in the Introduction to this report, the results of the focus group research suggest that the federal government faces the imperative of making a significant and greater effort to inform Canadians about Canada-U.S. free trade. In the period leading up to possible signing of a draft free trade agreement, this is seen as being a requirement for the government to make greater effort to inform and educate Canadians about the issues at stake in the negotiations and possible benefits and costs. People also seem to be calling upon the government as well to explain the rationale behind free trade with the United States and why Canada embarked upon the course of pursuing a free trade agreement with the United States in the first place.