

CHAPTER FOUR

The definition and operational implications of sustainable development have been firmly established for over ten years, including the watershed 1987 report of the UN Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future. It is therefore correct to assume that the Canadian government has identified the magnitude of current environmental problems and the likely economic impacts, both positive and negative, and that a reasoned and ordered set of environmental priorities have been identified.

Each year Environment Canada produces a comprehensive report entitled, The State of Canada's Environment Report. In the 1992 Report, for example, Chapter 12, "Energy: A Balance of Power", begins by stating that Canada is one of the most energy-intensive economies in the world, with one of the highest—if not the highest—per capita energy consumption ratios in the world. The Report outlines environmental impacts of energy use, as well as problems of acid rain and climate change. In addition, Chapter 22 of the 1992 Report outlines greenhouse gas sources, possible climatic shifts, Canadian contribution to the greenhouse effect, impacts on agriculture, forests, sea levels, freshwater resources, permafrost, wildlife and habitats, protected areas, etc. These are just two of numerous detailed, credible reports detailing the environmental impacts of energy use. On the international front, the OECD, the United Nations, the International Chamber of Commerce and many other organizations each year publish detailed reports on environmental problems, as well as cost-effective, demand and supply side energy efficiency solutions.

Clearly, enough information exists for government and industry to respond. Equally true, the precise definitions of sustainable development have been established for years. In the 1987 Brundtland Report, there is a clear recommendation that "a sustainable energy pathway is crucial to sustainable development." Clearly issues of sustainability for non-renewable energy sources like oil are different from renewable sources. Income from an exhaustible resource is, by definition, not sustainable forever. Accordingly, the question becomes a question of what is done with the net proceeds, or economic rents, from extraction. If all proceeds are spent on short-term consumption, then income from oil resources are not sustainable. But, if rents are invested in assets—in increasing efficiency, improving net inputs, reducing wasteful outputs—then a limited form of energy sustainability can be achieved. Technologies exist now whereby demand-side energy use for durable goods like light fixtures, home insulation, transport fuel efficiency, can be improved drastically—by up to 70 per cent or more.

Canada has already committed itself to stabilize carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2000. Is that not a priority? The Green Plan sets out priorities to address climate change, through such measures as minimum energy efficiency standards, the labelling of products to indicate energy efficiency levels, stricter building codes, greater public awareness, etc. It is not more consultations that we need, it is a commitment by the public and private sectors to stop talking about environmental goals, and start acting.

As troubling as this Committee's suggestion that there is a lack of credible, relevant information about implementing environmental policies is the persistence, in Chapter Four's sub-heading "The Need for a Realistic Response to Environmental Demands", of the false dichotomy between a healthy economy and a healthy environment. Canada is missing an