
STRATEGY REQUIREMENTS AND PROCESS REQUIREMENTS

In December 1995, Bill C-83 formally incorporated environmental concerns and sustainable development requirements within the Auditor General Act. These amendments:

- establish the position of a Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in the Office of the Auditor General;
- ensure that environmental considerations, in the context of sustainable development, are taken into account in the Auditor General's reports to the House of Commons;
- require all Ministers to table sustainable development strategies for their departments in Parliament by December 1997;
- require the strategies to be updated at least every three years and tabled in Parliament;
- authorize the Auditor General to forward petitions from the public on "environmental matters" to responsible Ministers; and,
- require the responsible Ministers to respond to the petitions within 120 days.

Cabinet guidance included in A Guide to Green Government indicates that strategies should include: departmental profiles, issue scans, objectives, action plans, and mechanisms for performance reporting, analysis and measurement. Strategies are also to include a plan for conducting a baseline study of taxes, grants and subsidies. Departments are instructed to report annually on progress towards sustainable development in Part III of their Main Estimates.

In addition, Departments must ensure that they obtain the perspectives of clients, partners and other interested parties on departmental priorities and how to achieve them.

In March 1997, the first Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development was tabled in the House of Commons. This document set out the Commissioner's mandate, priorities, and work program for the next two years. It has four main components:

- the review of the departments' sustainable development strategies;
- auditing of key environmental and sustainable development issues such as environmental assessment, climate change, and sustainable fisheries;
- special studies of issues such as Canada's international commitments and public and private sector performance;
- public petition monitoring on environmental and sustainable development issues.

PROCESS

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade responded quickly to the requirements, beginning its internal consultations even before the Amendments were officially passed. Using an employee awareness campaign, the Department asked all Branches for their input in two areas: an assessment of the Department's activities with respect to their impact on sustainable development, and suggestions for practical ways in which to apply the tenets of sustainable development to policies, programs and operations.