

4.1 DEFINITION

Because the differences among the separate technologies of electronic data processing, telecommunications and office automation are diminishing rapidly, the term Informatics is employed increasingly within the Canadian Government to describe electronic means used to collect, store, retrieve, produce, manipulate, display and disseminate information. Many systems' applications require a combination of all three and the trend in private industry is for suppliers to offer all of them as related services in one package. Moreover, the types of skills needed to plan, implement, operate and maintain systems applications are similar for each. The Department will have to move in future from dealing with the three technologies separately to adopting an approach in which they are integrated. However, this point has not yet been reached. The present version of this Plan focuses mainly on electronic data processing (EDP) but it uses the term Informatics to underline the importance of developing a progressively common approach to the three technologies.

4.2 SYSTEMS STRATEGY

4.2.1 PURPOSE

This Discussion Paper describes the present stage of the Department's Informatics development, the stage it wishes to reach within five years and how it should proceed in order to achieve this.

4.2.2 INTRODUCTION

Like other parts of the Government, this Department faces the challenge for the rest of the decade and beyond of having to increase the effectiveness of programme delivery and the quality and responsiveness of its services with a minimal increase in the level of resources. Expansion of the use of Informatics technology is increasingly seen within the Department as one way of meeting this challenge.

Experience of other organizations has shown that the introduction of new office technology can result in major problems because inadequate planning leads to the piecemeal acquisition of a variety of systems that are incompatible and/or for which sufficient qualified technical support personnel are unavailable. If the Department wishes to avoid these costly problems, then it is essential that the introduction of Informatics systems be in accordance with an approved long-term plan and that appropriate management, acquisition and support procedures be put in place and followed. The Department has already made some progress towards this goal with the establishment of a senior level EDP Policy Committee.

A study of Management Information needs at Headquarters completed a few months ago concluded that a number of areas including corporate management were poorly served with quantifiable data by existing systems. That report also identified a number of information system areas for further analysis and development, and work is underway on a number of short term projects. This planning document carries on from this earlier study by identifying and discussing the work the Department should undertake during the next five years.

4.2.3 DEPARTMENTAL PRIORITIES

Successful Informatics systems are those that contribute to achievement of the objectives of the substantive and functional areas of the Department. The process of evaluation, as well as of resource allocation, can be carried out with more precision than formerly with the establishment of the Operational Planning Framework (OPF). A pressing priority for the Department is to monitor its performance in order that it can respond to demands of Parliament and the central agencies for more comprehensive accounting of the way in which resources have been used and for more information about the value of its programs.