

**Summary of Public Comments on
*Towards a Sustainable Environment***

March 2005

Background

In June 2003, Nova Scotia Environment and Labour released *Towards a Sustainable Environment*. The document explains government's approach to sustainable environmental management.

More than 60 commitments were presented in this document. Many require collaboration between two or more government departments.

Between January 19 and March 31, 2004, individual Nova Scotians and organizations were invited to provide input and suggestions on how government can best implement the commitments made in *Towards a Sustainable Environment*.

Summary of Results

More than 200 individual Nova Scotians and organizations submitted nearly 2,000 comments. In general, they expressed support for the principles underlying *Towards a Sustainable Environment's* commitments. The following is a summary of comments from Nova Scotians.

Most important environmental issues facing Nova Scotians:

- land-use issues with a focus on coastal property, forested areas, wildlife habitat areas and wetlands
- decline in forest cover
- air and water pollution concerns including greenhouse gases, pesticide use, non-sustainable transportation, energy generation from coal and the impacts of residential and industrial development

Best way for government to support community efforts toward a healthy environment:

- provide funding to communities and community groups that are working to help the environment
- educate, provide information on how communities can improve their environment and how to live more sustainably
- seek community input and listen to what community groups are saying - involve them in projects in their community

Nearly all respondents indicated their belief that the environment affects their health.

Environmental influences most frequently identified:

- air pollution
- water pollution
- contaminants in the food chain

How government's priorities of economic growth, social programs and environmental management could be most effectively balanced:

- put equal weight on each of these priorities - consider the long-term impacts of placing greater importance on one of these priorities over the other (e.g. favouring economic well-being at the expense of the environmental well-being)
- focus on sustainable industries, such as tourism
- improve social programs and environmental considerations - this will automatically result in economic growth

From the many topics referred to in the consultation responses to *Towards a Sustainable Environment*, the following issues emerged as common themes:

Protected Areas – Many respondents mentioned protected areas in their comments. Common suggestions included purchase of additional land for protection, protection of specific areas, and creation of wilderness corridors between protected areas. A small proportion of respondents expressed concerns about the limitations that protected areas place on land use.

Off-Highway Vehicle Use – Many respondents were concerned with off-highway vehicle use in Nova Scotia. Many urged government to adopt the recommendations of the Voluntary Planning Off-Highway Vehicle Task Force. Some suggested an outright ban on the vehicles in the province. Others suggested limiting them to specific trails. A small proportion of respondents supported their use.

Energy Generation – Another recurring theme was concern related to pollution resulting from the use of non-renewable fuel (coal) to generate energy. Many respondents favoured the increased adoption of renewable energy alternatives such as wind or solar power.

Stronger Legislation/Regulation – Many respondents felt that existing environmental legislation and regulations could be strengthened in order to better protect the environment from a number of threats. Similarly, many commented that government should enforce both existing and new legislation more strictly.

Education/Promotion – The importance of education and promotion regarding environmental issues was another common theme. Many respondents highlighted the potentially positive impacts on the environment that would result from teaching Nova Scotians about changes they can make in their daily lives.

Next Steps

The comments gathered through the consultation process are being considered by departments as they develop and implement workplans, which translate the commitments into action.

Annual reports will track and describe government's progress in carrying out these commitments and in setting future directions for sustainable environmental management.