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10 Canada

Canada's Green Plan

by Robert J. P. Gale

10.1 Abstract

The Green Plan was formally announced by the Canadian government on December 11, 1990. It was intended to be a five-year, \$3-billion comprehensive environmental action plan to guide federal environmental policy. A key objective of the Plan's designers was to change the machinery of government concerning environment and sustainability issues. The Green Plan was purported to have been the planning process for ecological resources in the same way that the federal budget is the planning process for economic resources. This objective was not, however, articulated in the resulting plan – a plan that encountered considerable bureaucratic and external resistance in the drafting stage. The actual plan had more to do with spending than institutional change. Coercive instruments that would change behaviour to protect the environment, such as taxes and regulations, instruments that would ensure that Environment Canada maintained a high profile in government circles, were avoided. Spending priorities were geared to 'soft' policy areas such as research and public education. Following a change in government in 1993, the Green Plan lost support at key political and bureaucratic levels. Since then, it has been gradually abandoned. Cabinet has shifted away from a federal vision of environmental and sustainability planning towards departmental-based activities.

10.2 Introduction

The Green Plan was introduced during a period of intense interest in the environment in Canada. This interest was shaped by the growing strength of environmental organisations, the success of the Brundtland Commission's report, *Our Common Future*, and the emergence of Canadian business interest and funding for environmental initiatives. Not only had public

opinion changed over the course of the 1980s, but the concept of sustainable development provided a new discourse in which business, government and non-government organisations could participate with some degree of enthusiasm.

This account of the Green Plan focuses on its public policy origins and drafting. It is not about implementation. The objective is to examine the precursors of the plan as an environmental action plan for Canada (Section 2), trace the source of the plan as an idea (Section 3), describe how this idea was drafted into public policy (Sections 4 and 5), review the current status of the plan (Section 6), and summarise the lessons learned from the design and drafting stage (Section 7).

10.3 The Precursors of the Environmental Action Plan

Environment Canada has had a turbulent history since its creation in 1971. For example, in assessing the organisational design of the department as a policy instrument, Brown (1992: 41) describes the department's experience within the Canadian bureaucracy as a "roller-coaster ride".

The initial leg was a precipitous descent. Between 1973 and 1986, Environment Canada had to endure virtually all of the factors that can frustrate policy implementation. Ambivalence in public attitudes towards the environment and executive indifference translated into ambiguity in policy directives, limited funding, and a peripheral status in federal decision-making. The concept of design failure seemed increasingly apt.

Since 1986, however, a remarkable turnabout has catapulted Environment Canada upwards in terms of mandate and status within the federal bureaucracy.

This short-lived turnabout can be attributed to public concern for the environment and the discourse on sustainable development promoted by the Brundtland Commission. The turnabout was short-lived because the Green Plan was ultimately judged in partisan terms. The election of a new Liberal government in 1993 led to the devaluation of the portfolio, cuts of 30% to the department's budget and the abandonment of the Green Plan as a *bona fide* environmental action plan for Canada.

10.3.1 Public Concern for the Environment

Prompted by some high-level accidents, notably the Chernobyl nuclear power plant meltdown, the methyl isocyanate accident in Bhopal, and the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Alaska, public concern for the environment increased in the later half of the 1980s. The high level of concern created some dilemmas for the Progressive Conservative government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney first elected to power in 1984. Given that the party generally considered environmental issues at odds with its commitment to economic growth and free trade, it often found itself out-of-step with this concern. For example, in its negotiations with the United States for a bilateral free-trade agreement, the government did not understand the connections between the environment and the economy inherent in a trade agreement (Gale, 1995a). In the government's view, environmental matters were not relevant to a commercial

accord. This stance led to a great deal of activity and protest on the part of the Canadian environmental movement.

Public ambiguity about environmental issues played to the government's advantage. It meant that environmental issues were less pressing than free-trade issues for the majority of the electorate. At election time in 1988, a low approval rating on environmental issues was thus politically acceptable. By playing to public interest in jobs and economic growth, the government was able to split the opposition vote and win the election on its free-trade platform, a platform opposed by both opposition parties. Following the election, the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement came into effect January 1, 1989.

The political jousting between the government and environmentalists on free trade and other issues created a great deal of distrust on both sides. While the government's re-election established its power in economic matters, the growing public interest in the environment, pollution and resource depletion presented a challenge. Bakvis and Nevitt (1992: 145-146) provide some details about this challenge in terms of the greening of the Canadian electorate:

The 'green' issue has until recently been of relatively low interest to the general public. Gallup Canada, for example, has been asking the open-ended question, 'What is the most important problem facing this country today?' since February of 1983. As a volunteered response the environment became significant as a distinct category only in February 1987. Since then, however, it has rapidly become more consequential. When asked in February of 1990 how concerned they were about the environment as an issue, 78% of Canadians indicated they were 'very concerned', a change up from 67% when the same closed-ended question was asked in July of 1989. Only 'taxation levels', 'illegal drug use', and 'honesty in government' elicited comparable levels of concern.

Bakvis and Nevitt report that responses to open-ended questions are rather different. The question: 'What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?' elicited environmental concerns for the first time in February 1987.

. . . then 3% of respondents deemed it as the most important problem; by July 1989, 17% deemed it so, though by March 1990 it had declined to 14%.

They also report on data from national election surveys from 1974.

'What is the most important issue to you personally in this election? In 1979, only 0.2% of the electorate sampled raised the environment as the single most important issue; by 1988 a full 6% did so.

The open-ended data reveal rapid growth in support for the environment over a relatively short period of time. By the same token, these data also suggest that the issue does not dominate the public agenda. In the case of both the Gallup polls and the national election surveys, the environmental issue is easily outranked by concern with the 'economy/inflation and unemployment'; and in 1988 the election agenda was dominated by free trade. Clearly, individuals weigh the importance of the environment in conjunction with other concerns.

The increasing importance of environmental issues and the growing recognition that the government had to respond to this concern meant that a major environmental initiative was feasible at the beginning of 1989. Just what this initiative would be was not clear to either the bureaucracy or the new Minister, the Hon. Lucien Bouchard, at the start of his term.

Nevertheless, the climate for new ideas was favourable. The public was ahead of the politicians: something needed to be done.

10.3.2 The Brundtland Commission

The World Commission on Environment and Development chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland released its report *Our Common Future* on April 27, 1987. This report was well received in Canada, critics notwithstanding. The Brundtland Commission paved the way for the Green Plan because the Commission's work already had a sizeable following in Canadian policy circles. Public hearings had been held by the Commission in Ottawa May 26 to 28, 1986, which attracted the interest of many environment and development non-government organisations as well as a number of Cabinet Ministers.

Canadians played a prominent role in the Brundtland Commission. First, two Canadians were directly involved in the Commission's work. Maurice Strong, a member of the Commission, had previously held positions as Under-Secretary General and Special Advisor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (1976–78), and Secretary General, United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (1970–72). Jim MacNeill, the Commission's Secretary General, was formerly Director of Environment, OECD (1978–84) and Canadian Commissioner General, UN Conference on Human Settlements (1975–76). Their active involvement and liaison with Canadian officials helped to ensure interest in the Commission's deliberations at the highest policy level.

Second, the Minister of the Environment, the Hon. Charles Caccia, was instrumental in promoting the work of the Commission within the Liberal Cabinet of the day. He was already trying to influence issues in Canadian economic development from a sustainability perspective. In 1984, for example, he submitted briefs on sustainable development to a major commission on Canadian economic development prospects (Environment Canada, 1984a) and to the Brundtland Commission when it met in Ottawa (Environment Canada, 1984b).

Given these influences, there are at least three reasons the Brundtland Commission helped to pave the way for the Green Plan.

First, the Commission promoted the concept of sustainable development. This concept provided the necessary discourse to avoid the potential conflict between the public's demand for environmental protection and the federal government's pro-growth neo-conservative goals (Hoberg and Harrison, 1994). Although the Commission called for a profound re-ordering of government priorities and the integration of economic, social and environmental considerations in decision-making, it also largely dismissed the limits-to-growth thesis characteristic of the environmental debate fifteen years earlier, a debate still supported by many environmentalists. The Brundtland Commission's statement that the world economy

could be expected to increase by up to ten times its current size by 2050 provided a great deal of comfort to neo-conservatives. If the world economy – then valued at \$13 trillion – could grow to \$130 trillion by 2050, then government and business leaders could talk about sustainable development as sustainable growth. Not only were economic growth and environmental protection compatible, but also industry could adapt to any necessary changes by voluntary measures.

A second reason to account for the Commission's influence is that it prompted the federal government to respond. Given some anxiety about the Commission's recommendations, the government created a multi-stakeholder task force to report on the Commission's findings and their relevance to Canada. The National Task Force on Environment and Economy prepared a rather innocuous report, which dropped the equity considerations so prominent in *Our Common Future* (Gale, 1988). The sustainability challenge was redefined in economic and environmental terms. The Task Force report avoided contentious issues such as the then-current debate on the environmental impacts of free trade. Instead, it focused on win-win situations and the need for voluntary actions rather than coercive measures. Its positive business-government message was well received and led to the emergence of round tables as an instrument of consensus decision-making.

Third, the Brundtland Commission led to institutional reforms within Canada. Both the Ottawa-based National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy and the Winnipeg-based International Institute for Sustainable Development have their origins in the sustainable development debate initiated by the Brundtland Commission. Both have mandates concerned with the integration of economic and environmental considerations in decision-making. Both would benefit from a federal environmental action plan that set out the government's policy goals. The NRTEE, for example, which was already established when the Green Plan idea emerged, would have its own ideas about how the government should develop the plan.

10.4 The Green Plan Idea

While it is often difficult to trace the origin of ideas in public policy, the Green Plan appears to be the product of three converging agendas. First, the environmental community provided the government with both a message and an agenda. Second, following the 1988 election the new Minister of the Environment the Hon. Lucien Bouchard – a novice in Cabinet – was seeking a mission of his own. Third, Environment Canada, armed with the mission of sustainable development finally had a way of leveraging influence in the bureaucracy. The department was eager to enhance its role in decisions about the environment and economy with initiatives of its own. Each of these considerations is considered in turn.

10.4.1 ENGO Influence

There was a large increase in the membership of environmental organisations in the late 1980s. Friends of the Earth is a case in point. Once a small and struggling organisation with serious cash-flow problems, this organisation had revenues in excess of \$1 million by the end of the decade. Other organisations such as Pollution Probe, Greenpeace and the Canadian Wildlife Federation also prospered. Many now worked together to lobby government for action on environmental and resource management issues. In 1988, some groups joined forces under the aegis of the Greenprint for Canada Committee to prepare their own environmental action plan for Canada – the *Greenprint for Canada*. This document, or at the very least the Committee's idea, was to have some considerable influence on the Minister of the Environment, Lucien Bouchard.

The origin of the *Greenprint* document is explained by Stephen Hazell who was then working for the Canadian Wildlife Federation (Hazell, 1996).

The Greenprint for Canada Committee was established in late 1988 following the November federal election. Ken Brynaert, my boss at the Canadian Wildlife Federation, had been to Washington in early November just after the American Presidential election and had attended a presentation of the so-called "Blueprint for the Environment" by a number of U.S. national environmental groups to President-elect George Bush. Given that in Canada the re-elected Progressive Conservatives had demonstrated a willingness to address environmental issues in their second term in office, Brynaert considered that there was merit in trying something similar in Canada. I was asked to take on the job of mobilising the support of environmental conservation and aboriginal organisations for a focused action plan to guide the federal government during its four- to five-year term of office.

Within six months, a document entitled "Greenprint for Canada" had been developed and approved by over 30 major groups throughout Canada. These included organisations as diverse as World Wildlife Fund, Friends of the Earth, Société pour vaincre la pollution, Canadian Arctic Resources Committee and the Assembly of First Nations. On June 18, 1989, we presented the document to Environment Minister Lucien Bouchard and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

Bouchard was excited by our idea of an overall federal environmental strategy, and was able to convince the Prime Minister that this should be a government priority. The plans for the Green Plan which had already been initiated within Environment Canada were thus given a dramatic political impetus.

The success of this particular initiative should not be underestimated. It is part of a wider trend. Wilson (1992: 123), for example, has studied the influence of green lobbies in decision-making.

During the past 20 years, Canada's environmental groups have elbowed their way into the policy communities that shape government decisions on the environment. In the process, they have transformed decision-making systems. They have expanded the number of policy communities by putting a host of new issues on the agenda, altered the make-up of existing communities by demanding a voice, and added to the number of government officials involved in the process by pressing for the establishment of new environmental departments and regulatory authorities.

The Greenprint for Canada Committee may have helped persuade the government to

create an environmental action plan. At the time of the Greenprint Committee meeting with the Prime Minister and Mr. Bouchard, Mr. Mulroney had little positive to say about the proposal. This view appears to have changed quickly once Mr. Bouchard argued privately in its favour as something he personally wanted to do.

It is less clear how influential the *Greenprint* document was at the drafting stage. As a measure of its success the government included a comparison of the *Green Plan* and the *Greenprint* in its presskit about the Plan. Since this comparison covers only 15 of the 43 *Greenprint* recommendations and has the appearance of being rather hastily prepared, the comparison may have had more to do with a last-minute public relations exercise than a serious response to *Greenprint* proposals.

ENGO influence appears to have peaked in the late 1980s. Although flush with funds at the time, inadequate provisions were made for the future. The failure of environmental groups to set aside contingency funds has led to their virtual collapse in Canada. Rapidly declining revenues from private subscriptions and government grants has led to the marginalization of the very policy community the Green Plan was attempting to serve – albeit poorly in the estimation of many such groups.

10.4.2 Political Influence

At the political level the idea for the Green Plan is attributed to Mr. Bouchard. At the time of his appointment, the Environment Ministry was a low-profile portfolio. This was to change quickly. The Prime Minister wanted his personal friend to have a high-profile position in Cabinet. Yet, Mr. Bouchard was a relative newcomer to government. He did not have the track record to assume a senior Cabinet post. Some changes were thus required to elevate Mr. Bouchard's status in Cabinet. To this end, the Minister was added to two committees of the powerful inner circle of Cabinet members – the Priorities and Planning Committee and the Operations Committee. He also was placed in charge of a new coordinating committee, the Cabinet Committee on Environment. This was the first time in its sixteen-year history that Environment Canada had both a champion in its Minister and a Minister with the full support of the Prime Minister at the key decision-centre of government – Cabinet. The implications for the Ministry's organisational design were positive (Brown, 1992: 40).

A dawning public and prime-ministerial conviction that environment protection enhances rather than thwarts the prospects for sustainable growth has not only reaffirmed the original design, but ushered in an intense period of re-design resulting in a greatly enhanced role for Environment Canada within the federal bureaucracy.

The fact that the Environment Minister had the Prime Minister's unequivocal support was probably crucial to the eventual launch of the Green Plan. The most likely explanation for the origins of the Plan arises with Mr. Bouchard's interest in establishing himself as a force within Cabinet. To this end, he needed a portfolio larger than that traditionally held by an Environment Minister. It appears that the idea of a national environmental strategy,

presented to him by the Greenprint for Canada Committee, caught his attention. By that time he would have been well aware of the Brundtland Commission's report and the proposals of officials in his Ministry. It is reported that "Bouchard was inspired by the Brundtland Commission's call for integration of economic and environmental considerations and called for preparation of what he referred to as an environmental 'master plan'" (Hoberg and Harrison, 1994). Given the convergence of agendas, the timing of the *Greenprint* document could not have been better.

10.4.3 Environment Canada's Influence

Although largely staffed by experts in the life, chemical and engineering sciences, key personnel in the department have supported broad scale environmental planning initiatives for many years. This is evident in the preparation of, or response to, many domestic and international documents. At the international level, the department often has benefited from U.S. legislation: it has not only had to keep up with American regulatory trends, but in some instances has had to justify reasons for either not doing so or for adopting a different approach. It also has benefited from international initiatives. The 1980 IUCN World Conservation Strategy provided sections of the department with compelling arguments for conservation and protection. The department later produced its own report on the conservation challenge for Canada (Pollard and McKechnie, 1986).

At the domestic level, some key personnel in the department embraced the 1977 Science Council of Canada's report, *Canada as a Conserver Society: Resource Uncertainties and the Need for New Technologies*, as well as the work of George Francis (1976) on ecodevelopment for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). This work long predates the Brundtland Commission. It provided important precursory information by developing the constituency for environment and economy integration so prominently emphasised in *Our Common Future*. But it is difficult to isolate any information, events, actors, or institutions as harbingers of the Green Plan. Environment Canada (1990a), for example, published a nine-page record of achievement on environmental issues with the Green Plan documentation. The achievements are broken down into 10 categories: International (18); Federal-Provincial (9); Legislation (10); Water Quality Initiatives (8); Climate Change (9); Acid Rain Abatement (4); Technology Development and Pollution Abatement (7); National Parks and Historic Sites (7); Wildlife (5); and Sustainable Development (15). The extent to which one or more of these achievements helped pave the way for the Green Plan has not been evaluated.

Policy analysts and consultants often argue that Environment Canada lacks the policy skills of other departments – witness the fact that the Green Plan was written largely by outsiders brought into the department to do the policy work. This observation disguises another important fact. Policy-makers throughout government have been unable to integrate

economic and environmental decisions in policy-making. While it is true that Environment Canada lacks policy development skills, the more pressing short-coming resides within the overall machinery of government: it is dysfunctional in its treatment of environment economy issues. It is unreasonable to fault Environment Canada for lacking the integrative policy skills that the Government of Canada (i.e., Cabinet) does not wish any level of the bureaucracy to have or develop.

The three converging agendas of interest of the ENGOs, politicians and bureaucracy were mediated by other pressures and interests little of which has been documented. One thread of influence which has been ignored to date is the role of The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy – an organisation then casting around for ideas about its own mission. In 1989, when it was clear that the government was interested in developing an action plan, NRTEE started to lobby for a lead role in implementing a federal strategy on the environment and more broadly, on sustainable development. It is clear now that this was perhaps too late in the day for NRTEE to substantially influence either Environment Canada or the Minister of Environment. Although aspects of the chronology are missing, NRTEE's interest in an environmental action plan can be traced to an informal request by the Minister of Environment in June of 1989 for NRTEE's advice and support on an Environmental Agenda for Canada. Prior to this request, the NRTEE did not have a position on the *Greenprint for Canada* proposal, nor had the ENGOs sought NRTEE endorsement. An environmental action plan for Canada had thus not figured in the NRTEE's inaugural meeting in June 1989, which the Prime Minister opened.

Because the *Greenprint* proposal had gone to the Minister in June of 1989, and he was already convinced of the idea's merit, NRTEE's involvement in the subsequent action plan was to be marginal at best. This was probably inevitable given the construction of institutional roles and linkages. The Minister was in charge of his department, not the NRTEE: it reported directly to the Prime Minister. A more substantial role for the Round Table would inevitably diminish Environment Canada's control of the agenda. Environment Canada likely viewed this as a threat to its own autonomy. While this is understandable in the context of moving an initiative forward quickly, it was a tactical error in the longer term. The NRTEE's major concern was that the proposed federal strategy on the environment be broadened to a federal strategy for sustainable development. It proposed a scenario to the Prime Minister in which a Federal Strategy on the Environment would be announced in February 1990 as the first step in a wider strategy on sustainable development. The government would then ask the NRTEE to develop a more comprehensive program leading to a Federal Strategy for Sustainable Development. The Prime Minister responded that the environmental agenda would be a sustainable development plan and advised that the NRTEE proposal did not fit its mandate at that time.

Excluding the NRTEE from ownership of the Green Plan led to the loss of another champion for sustainable development within the federal bureaucracy. This has led not only to the loss of the Green Plan as a national environmental and sustainability planning tool, but also to the demise and increasing irrelevancy of the NRTEE as an independent and authoritative voice on sustainability in Canada.

10.5 Planning the Content: Goals and Initiatives

Mr. Bouchard based his vision of an environmental action plan for Canada on the concept of sustainable development. In a 1989 speech, he stated that:

The environmental program for Canada will serve as a framework for strategic initiatives which will change our way of making decisions:

to improve our decisions by basing them on better scientific knowledge, better training, more certain data and better communications, and by using the latest technology for protecting the environment and producing reports on the state of our environment;

to change the decision-making process within the government of Canada, by requiring all departments to take environmental considerations into account when developing policies and programs;

to emphasise the importance of co-operation and sharing of responsibilities by establishing new partnerships, and by renewing those that already exist, between all elements of society: governments, companies, unions, non-governmental agencies and citizens.

By the time the Green Plan was announced, however, Mr. Bouchard had left Cabinet in a dispute over the role of Quebec in confederation. His successor, the Hon. Robert de Côtret, was a Cabinet Minister with firsthand knowledge and experience of the Treasury Board, the department which allocates resources among competing ministries. It fell to Mr. de Côtret to secure the \$3 billion for the five-year plan. In a press release announcing the plan, Mr. de Côtret stated:

This is a fully funded plan that commits the Government of Canada to \$3 billion over five years in new funding for the environment. Moreover, *Canada's Green Plan* represents a government-wide commitment directly involving more than 40 federal departments and agencies.

Canada's Green Plan is second to none in its comprehensive approach to a full range of environmental challenges, funding, accountability and provision for public involvement.

The plan set out a number of goals and key initiatives. Mr. de Côtret argued that it contained "clear targets and schedules that provide a yardstick for judging the success of the Plan." The key program areas and goals as well as an analysis of the choice of instruments in the plan follows

10.5.1 Summary of Goals and Key Initiatives

More than 100 initiatives were contained in *Canada's Green Plan* for a healthy environment. Eight broad categories were identified, each with different programs, goals, and initiatives. Funding for each category was earmarked as follows:

1) CLEAN AIR, WATER AND LAND	(\$850 million)
2) SUSTAINING OUR RENEWABLE RESOURCES	(\$350 million)
3) SPECIAL SPACES AND SPECIES	(\$175 million)
4) THE ARCTIC	(\$100 million)
5) GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY	(\$575 million)
6) DECISION MAKING	(\$500 million)
7) STARTING IN OUR OWN HOUSE	(\$275 million)
8) EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	(\$175 million)

Further information is provided in Annex 1. The department's 174-page publication *Canada's Green Plan*, which was distributed free of charge, described each initiative in greater detail. The department also published a "*Summary of Targets and Initiatives*" reproduced in Annex 2. Some of the major undertakings included:

- Virtual elimination of the discharge of persistent toxic substances into the environment,
- Canada-wide reduction of the concentration of ground-level ozone (smog) to below the threshold of health effects in the most susceptible segments of the population,
- A 50-per-cent reduction in Canada's generation of waste by 2000,
- The shifting of forest management from sustained yield to sustainable development,
- The setting aside of 12 per cent of the country as protected space,
- Completion of the national parks system by 2000,
- Stabilisation of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels by 2000,
- Phasing-out CFCs by 1997, and methyl chloroform and other major ozone-depleting substances by 2000,
- A 50-per-cent reduction of sulphur dioxide emissions in eastern Canada by 1994. Capping of acid-rain-related emissions in eastern Canada beyond 1994. Extension of the acid rain control program to emissions in western Canada.

10.5.2 The Choice of Policy Instrument

The substance of the Green Plan has been criticised by environmentalists and others as vague or insubstantial. Although publicity for the plan emphasised 120 different initiatives for which actions would be taken, uncertainty about the type of actions proposed created confusion about the policy instruments that would be applied. In exploring the policy instruments in the Green Plan, Hoberg and Harrison (1994) identified six categories "which vary significantly according to the level of coercion involved and also how directly they seek to improve environmental quality." Their six categories are regulation, direct spending, information regulation, information dissemination, information development, and agreements. Using this framework to identify policy instruments, Hoberg and Harrison counted 239 distinct initiatives. On the basis of their analysis, they conclude that:

The most striking result is the disproportionate reliance on expenditure programs that seek to influence behaviour only indirectly, if at all, and the relatively small number of initiatives that

directly affect environmental quality. Regulatory and direct expenditure initiatives together account for only 20 per cent of the original Green Plan, and 16 per cent of the initiatives announced thus far. It bears stressing that despite the heavy emphasis on expenditures, Green Plan spending is not oriented towards direct cleanup. . . . By far the most frequently used instrument is information development, which accounts for over half of all initiatives in both the original plan and the initiatives already announced.

Given the focus on information development, it is not surprising that environmentalists were disappointed with the plan. In essence, they argued that it lacked the effective type of measures one might see in a budget, such as new taxes or tougher regulations. For many it represented nothing more than a green veneer over the *status quo*. This suggests that Environment Canada either overestimated its abilities to satisfy some key demands of the ENGO community or was willing to forgo their demands to appease business or other interests. Either way, support from the only constituency that had a long-term stake in the *Green Plan*'s future was undermined. When the plan died with the new Liberal Government, there were no environmental groups ready to champion its virtues.

It is, of course, possible to argue that environmentalists' demands were unreasonable, that is, "radical", and would have had major impacts on the economy. Doern and Conway (1994: 120) for example, embrace industries' view when they state that "environmentalists had argued for a radical policy employing green taxes, a 'big stick' approach to regulation and emission control standards which would have moved Canada out in front of other OECD countries." There is little evidence to support this view. Given the initiatives on environmental taxation and regulation underway at the time, more innovative and front-runner policies were already being implemented in Europe (Gale, 1995b).

10.6 Drafting The Agenda: Actors Are Territorial

In the Canadian federation, actions on the environment at the federal level are constrained by the constitution. Although federal powers are extensive, the practice has been to allow the ten provinces to assume control over most environmental issues, excluding those having a bilateral or international dimension. This means that each province has its own environmental assessment process in addition to the federal process (now legislated under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act). What this means in practice is that some project proponents have faced both provincial and federal environmental assessments. Although federal powers are used reluctantly, there is a tendency among the provinces to construe any federal intervention as unwarranted interference in domestic affairs. Many environmentalists, however, see the federal role as essential. They want to prevent short-term development opportunities that have unacceptably high environmental costs.

With regard to the Green Plan, the territorial aspect of environmental planning and decision making can largely be traced through the perspectives of competing political and bureaucratic actors, the steps taken in public consultations, and the methods used to resolve

conflict during the drafting stage.

10.6.1 Political Actors

When it announced the Green Plan on 11 December 1990, the Progressive Conservative government was in its second term of office. Some six months earlier the American and Mexican presidents had agreed to pursue talks on a bilateral trade agreement beginning in 1991. This agreement's potential implications for Canada was a source of concern for the Canadian government. This was resolved in part when Canada was invited to join the negotiations in February 1991 – negotiations for a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Given the government's experience with the Canada-U.S. FTA, it was clear that NAFTA also would be an issue at the next election. In the 1988 election, the FTA was vigorously criticised by the two major opposition parties, the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party. It was also opposed by many nationalists, labour unions, and social and environmental non-government organisations. As noted previously, the Conservatives campaigned on the issue of free trade and won the election. In preparing for the next free trade fight, the opportunity to increase the government's popularity or at least neutralise opposition through a major environmental initiative may have appealed to some members of Cabinet. An environmental action plan, based on the concept of sustainable development, was not considered to have any far-reaching implications for free-trade negotiations. More modest objectives were anticipated as detailed by Mr. Bouchard in a speech given 5 October 1989. The government clearly believed that free trade and sustainable development could proceed as two separate, unrelated initiatives. This miscalculation was later to cause serious difficulties in the trade negotiations (Gale, 1995a).

10.6.2 Bureaucratic Actors

The growth of public interest in the environment in the late 1980s provided Environment Canada with an opportunity to secure more resources and influence. Although public sector interest in the drafting of the Green Plan was negligible at the outset, this changed when it became clear that the plan represented an opportunity for other ministries to participate in a new area of government spending.

At the bureaucratic level, the drafting of the Green Plan was initiated by a new Deputy Minister of Environment Canada, Dr. Len Good, in the summer of 1989. The Policy Directorate within the department's Corporate Planning Group was responsible for drafting the document. The drafting process was a relatively small effort, tightly managed by the Policy Directorate. It involved about six people at the beginning – with others in supporting roles – all under the direction of the Deputy Minister. The Deputy's objective was to determine the Green Plan's policy 'architecture'. He sought a structure for the plan around

which he could build a story.

Of the original team of six people, three were central to the drafting of the Plan: the Deputy Minister, the Assistant Deputy Minister in charge of Policy, and the Director General, Policy, who undertook the drafting. The Deputy Minister came to the department with exemplary knowledge of and experience with machinery of government issues. Dr. Good had not only had an intimate understanding of policy management in government but also the capacity to extract \$3-billion in program expenditure commitments from the system, the type of experience lacking at Environment Canada. Dr. Good also had direct experience in another national planning exercise, the National Energy Program of 1980. That program was introduced as a Canadian solution to the rapid increase in world oil prices. Oil companies and some provincial governments, however, judged it to be unacceptable interference.

Knowledge of environmental issues and departmental matters was provided by the Assistant Deputy Minister, Dr. Robert Slater. Having joined the department five months after it was created, Dr. Slater had 17 years of experience in environment and sustainability with the department. Brian Emmett, Director General, Policy, the third member of the team, had the task of creating the architecture and story line for the Green Plan. Both were facilitated by a series of show-and-tell "slide decks."

The framework that emerged for the plan consisted of two interacting components: decision-making and action on the issues. Changes in the way the government made decisions were articulated in the public consultation document *A Framework For Discussion on the Environment* (Environment Canada, 1990b: 7).

There are three basic steps to correcting existing failures in decision-making. First, we must *improve the factors* that affect decision-making. Second, we must change decision-making *processes and institutions*. Third, we need to strengthen and build *partnerships*.

Each step is discussed in greater detail in the *Framework* paper. The factors that affect decision-making are identified as better science, more information about the environment, education, legislation and economic instruments. Each is discussed in turn. Changing decision-making processes requires integrating environmental and economic considerations in policy-making and adopting a code of environmental stewardship. Finally, strengthening partnerships refers to strengthening support of international efforts to address environmental problems and strengthening relationships with the provinces, environmental groups and aboriginal people.

10.6.3 The Consultative Process

The Minister first presented the Green Plan to the Priorities and Planning Committee of Cabinet in January 1990. This Plan met with stiff resistance from the Ministers of Finance, Industry, International Trade, and Treasury Board. Underlying this resistance was the fear of

bureaucrats in these departments that Environment Canada was engaged in a "power grab" (Howard, 1989). Finance and Treasury Board, with Central agency status, were not committed to the social construction of environmental issues as a problem of development; nor did they wish to see their role as guardian of public finances usurped by Environment Canada.

Cabinet thus required public consultations on the plan and its re-submission at a later date. These consultations were steered by a new Minister, Robert de Côtret, following Mr. Bouchard's resignation over constitutional proposals affecting Quebec's status in confederation.

The consultation process was hastily organised and implemented. It involved "41 information sessions attended by 6,000 people, two day consultations in 17 cities attended by 3,500 people, and a wrap-up session in Ottawa attended by approximately 400 'stakeholders,' all at a cost of roughly \$7 million" (Hoberg and Harrison, 1994: 126). The document itself met with a great deal of criticism from academics, environmentalists, and industry. By the time the consultations concluded in August of 1990, both the plan and process had been soundly condemned by many.

Despite the scope and expense, the consultations were a political disaster for DOE [Department of Environment]. Although industry groups had a problem with the consultations, environmental groups were even more upset. They complained that the vagueness of the discussion document and the cast number of participants prevented any meaningful analysis of the options or discussion of priorities. DOE could not shake environmentalists' perceptions that the key decisions were already made and the consultations mere window dressing and a delaying tactic (Hoberg and Harrison, 1994: 126).

Even though the consultation process was rushed, it was clear that the government was committed to a new spending initiative. This made it more attractive for other, formerly hostile departments, to become involved. The Cabinet's agreement to the five-year \$3-billion plan may well be attributed to the fact that more than half of the budget was allocated to other departments.

Environmental groups generally were disappointed with the Green Plan. Not only had they expressed concerns about the consultation process, but they found the Plan lacking in substance. Industry's reaction to the plan was more favourable. This is largely because it did not contain the regulatory or economic instruments that they feared. There was little need to be critical. Industry's influence and active lobbying, originally evident in the 1987 Task Force report on the Brundtland Commission, ensured that the plan would be innocuous. It is important to note that industry sought less regulation and the adoption of the voluntary approach rather than new market-based instruments. They were, for example, vehemently opposed to carbon or energy taxes. This view is at odds with the observation that Doern and Conway (1994: 121) make:

For business, however, the most serious problem with the Green Plan is that it fails to

demonstrate a serious commitment to the use of market-based policy instruments as a complement to traditional regulation.

This is entirely a rhetorical argument for business. At the time of the Green Plan's development, few if any were seeking market-based instruments. If anything, they argued against them as having serious impacts on competitiveness, a position which has strengthened with time.

The Green Plan contained no threats to the autonomy of provincial governments. It followed the path of least resistance by developing non-coercive policy instruments. In Canada, the constitutional division of powers between federal and provincial governments places institutional constraints on policy makers. Provincial governments seek to prevent intrusion into matters they consider within their jurisdiction. As owners of natural resources and promoters of private economic development, the provinces feared the imposition of new environmental regulations or taxes. There was already federal-provincial tension over the application of federal environmental assessment powers. Environmental groups had used federal regulations to question the impact of two specific development projects, one in Alberta, the other in Saskatchewan. The governments of these provinces resented the role the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office played in evaluating the impacts of the two projects.

There also was apprehension about the imposition of a carbon tax, particularly in Alberta, a fossil-fuel based economy. As a consequence, the Green Plan contained no new economic instruments: instead it declared that it would conduct a study. When the plan was finally released, provincial governments reacted with general approval. It was not viewed as an intervention in provincial affairs; rather, the evidence pointed to an increase in regional spending on environmental research and the dissemination of information, steps that would produce local benefits.

10.6.4 Points of Conflict During the Drafting Stage

The attempt to formulate a comprehensive environmental plan led to conflicts over money and autonomy within the federal government. Environment Canada was traditionally seen as a "spending" and regulatory department in government circles. It was a *line* department with little real influence compared to key decision centres such as the Treasury Board and the Department of Finance. These latter agencies, the "guardians" of the public purse, oversaw all federal spending and revenue generation. In a period of fiscal restraint, money allocated to environment had to come from other line departments. This led to conflict with other departments seeking to protect or expand their own programs and services. Moreover, the elevation of environmental considerations to the same status as economic considerations – a key recommendation of the Brundtland Commission – would give the Minister of the Environment more influence and power in Cabinet decisions than ever before. Many

departments would not be able to pursue their traditional mandates without Environment Canada's involvement. Many interpreted this shift in policy emphasis as interference in another department's affairs that would jeopardise their own autonomy. For the Green Plan to succeed, "it would have to either avoid or surmount the obstacles of opposition from within the federal government" (Hoberg and Harrison, 1994: 123).

At the provincial level, the strongest opposition to the drafting of a Green Plan came from the Government of Alberta. This government feared the type of federal involvement in provincial affairs it experienced during the world oil crisis of 1980. At that time, the Liberal government of the day introduced a National Energy Program (NEP) to control the price of domestic oil. Viewing this as an intrusion into provincial affairs, one which affected its revenues and authority, the Alberta Government pursued a lengthy fight to repeal the NEP. Ten years later, it feared a national environmental program that would also intrude on its affairs or lead to measures such as carbon taxes, which would affect its oil-based economy. The fact that one of the architects of the National Energy Plan – Dr. Len Good – was now the new federal Deputy Minister of the Environment increased their apprehension.

Although the Green Plan was supposed to have been developed with full public participation, the Department of Finance saw it as a budgetary exercise requiring secrecy. This approach created conflict with environmentalists, who advocated openness, and with industry, which feared increased costs. Runnels (1993: 4) reports increasing anxiety among industry of what was to come. When a section of the Plan about a carbon tax was leaked to the powerful Business Council on National Issues, the energy sector intervened. A complaint to the Prime Minister's Office killed any further development of a carbon tax.

10.7 Current Status of National Environmental Planning in Canada

Since the general election of 1993, the Green Plan has been gradually abandoned by the Liberal government. The new Minister of Environment saw the plan in partisan terms, something that could have been avoided if both the ENGOs and the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy had been given ownership of the agenda. Not having planned for the longer term, environmental groups have been fighting for survival since the beginning of the 1990s. A number have folded or reduced their activities to a shadow of the past. Since 1993, when it was important to push the new Minister to develop a better action plan rather than simply abandon it altogether, environmental groups have had no capacity for concerted action. Single-issue campaigns again dominate their diminished activities. There is a sense that the environmental movement has come full circle in an issue-attention cycle that leaves the government controlling the environmental agenda with virtually no external criticism from either opposition parties or ENGOs.

The NRTEE is in no better shape with regard to resources or strategic thinking. Since its

birth in 1989, it has become an increasingly partisan organisation, now headed by a former Liberal politician. Sustainable development has become a term in disrepute; advice is provided only when it is sought. The organisation is no longer the consultative "think-tank" it was envisioned to be.

10.8 Lessons Learned

Canada's experience with the Green Plan, that is, with national environmental planning, leads to at least four major lessons:

1) **An effective national environmental plan requires the support of the environmental policy community.**

Environment Canada neglected its own constituency in broad measure to secure a plan that it could implement within the federal bureaucracy. This was a risky strategy. When the political champions left, there was no support for the Green Plan either within government or externally. Because the plan was not integrated into the Cabinet system of government nor into the budgetary process, Environment Canada was not able to defend it against cutbacks or wilful neglect. When it was abandoned, there was no political, bureaucratic, or ENGO resistance. Arms-length government organisations such as the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy or the International Institute for Sustainable Development were also conspicuous in their silence. To be effective, an environmental plan must have the support of the policy community it is intended to serve.

2) **A national environmental plan is different from a national sustainability plan.**

The Green Plan contained elements of both a national environmental plan and a national sustainability plan but it was neither fully one plan nor the other. It is important thus to distinguish environmental planning from sustainability planning. The context for planning will vary with the focus. An environmental focus, for example, may not bring into play the same level of scrutiny of economic development practices inherent in a sustainability focus. The extent to which environmental problems are considered to be a social construct of development is a critical distinguishing feature of the two approaches. For this reason, beginning with a federal strategy for the environment may have been an important precursor to developing a federal strategy for sustainability. Using the terms environment and sustainability interchangeably is counterproductive.

3) **Motivations matter: public opinion is less important than political leadership and commitment.**

Public opinion on the environment was a critical factor in motivating federal government action on the Green Plan. In retrospect, it is hard not to see the plan as little more than a public relations exercise. The Conservative government increased its political capital by addressing public concerns about the environment when these concerns were at their peak. It

managed to do this without alienating other key constituencies; first because it drafted a rather unchallenging plan, and second, because it never forged an alliance with the ENGO community. Experience shows, however, that public opinion cannot be relied on to support almost any initiative, let alone an environmental action plan. It is political leadership and commitment that is required to implement policy changes, especially when public sentiment changes as other issues gain more prominence.

4) **A partisan agenda will kill a national environmental plan.**

The Green Plan was high on symbolic policy initiatives for the Conservative Party. They came up with the strategy and name for the plan. This meant that opposition parties had no vested ownership in the plan. Unlike the budget process wherein one can disagree over any particular budget measure, the new Liberal government disagreed with the idea of the plan itself. Rather than reformulate a plan in their own image as with a budget, they abandoned the plan altogether. Instead of focusing on how best to spend \$3 billion allocated to Green Plan initiatives, they began the process of downsizing Environment Canada and moving away from a national and concerted approach to environmental planning. They viewed the Green Plan in partisan terms and sought ways to wind down the plan during the course of their mandate. The implication of this experience for national environmental planning is clear: steps must be taken to set up a planning process which all parties can respect irrespective of who is in power.

Annex

Section I: Clean Air, Water and Land (\$850 million)

Health and Environment

Goal: To ensure that citizens today and tomorrow have clean air, water and land essential to sustaining human health and the environment

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 7

Continuing Action to Protect and Restore Our Water

Goal: To protect and enhance water quality and promote the wise and efficient use of water

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 11

Keeping Toxics Out of Our Environment

Goal: Virtual elimination of the discharge of persistent toxic substances into the environment

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 5

Reducing Smog

Goal: Canada-wide reduction of the concentration of ground-level ozone (smog) to below the threshold of health effects in the most susceptible segments of the population

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 9

Cutting Waste

Goal: A 50% reduction in Canada's generation of waste by the year 2000

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 13

Section II: Sustaining our Renewable Resources (\$350 million)

Sustainable Forestry Development

Goal: Shift the management of Canada's forests from sustained yield to sustainable development

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 8

Sustainable Agriculture

Goal: Maintain and enhance the natural resources that the agri-food sector uses or affects, while ensuring environmental, economic and social integration

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 5

Sustainable Fisheries

Goal: The long-term sustainability of our fisheries resource

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 9

Section III: Special Spaces and Species (\$175 million)

Protecting Unique Ecological Areas

Goal: To set aside as protected space 12% of Canada

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 9

Sustaining Wildlife

Goal: To maintain and enhance the health and diversity of our wild animals and plants

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 9

Historical Heritage

Goal: To commemorate and protect historical heritage important to all Canadians

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 3

Section IV: The Arctic (\$100 million)

Preserving the Integrity of Our Northland

Goal: The long-term sustainability of our fisheries resource

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 1

Section V: Global Environmental Security (\$575 million)

Global Warming

Goal: To stabilise national emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases at 1990 levels by the year 2000

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 24

Ozone Depletion

Goal: Phase out use of CFCs by 1997 and methyl chloroform and other major ozone-depleting substances by the year 2000

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 3

Acid Rain

Goal: To cap acid rain-related emissions in Eastern Canada beyond 1994 by extended federal-provincial agreements and expand the control program to establish a national emission cap for the year 2000

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 8

International Progress on the Environment

Goal: To: accelerate global co-operation, understanding and progress on environmental issues

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 7

Section VI: Decision Making (\$500 million)

Partnerships

Goal: To strengthen existing environmental partnerships within Canada and build new ones

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 12

Environmental Information

Goal: To provide timely, accurate and accessible environmental information to enable Canadians to make environmentally sensitive decisions

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 8

Environmental Citizenship

Goal: To develop an environmentally literate society; equip citizens with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for action

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 1

Supporting New Science

Goal: To strengthen the nation's environmental science and technology with a special emphasis on understanding regional ecosystems

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 7

Legislative, Regulatory and Market Tools for Change

Goal: The balanced use of strong and effective environmental laws, with market-based approaches for environmental protection

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 3

Section VII: Starting in our own House (\$275 million)

Goal: To ensure that all of the federal government's operations meet or exceed national targets and schedules

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 5

Section VIII: Emergency Preparedness (\$175 million)

Environmental Emergencies

Goal: To respond quickly and effectively to threats posed by human-made pollution emergencies and naturally occurring environmental emergencies

Number of Initiatives Associated with Program: 11

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