



Environment
Canada

Environnement
Canada

SYNTHESIS REPORT: PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS ON THE DRAFT FEDERAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2013–2016

Sustainable Development Office
Environment Canada

October 2013

ISBN 978-1-100-22715-3
Cat. No.: En4-136/1-2013E-PDF

Information contained in this publication or product may be reproduced, in part or in whole, and by any means, for personal or public non-commercial purposes, without charge or further permission, unless otherwise specified.

You are asked to:

- Exercise due diligence in ensuring the accuracy of the materials reproduced;
- Indicate both the complete title of the materials reproduced, as well as the author organization; and
- Indicate that the reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada and that the reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.

Commercial reproduction and distribution is prohibited except with written permission from the Government of Canada's copyright administrator, Public Works and Government Services of Canada (PWGSC). For more information, please contact PWGSC at 613-996-6886 or at droitdauteur.copyright@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca.

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, represented by the Minister of the Environment, 2013

Aussi disponible en français

The draft 2013–2016 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (FSDS) was released for public consultation from February 15 to June 14, 2013, as required by subsection 9(3) of the [*Federal Sustainable Development Act*](#) (the Act). During the 120-day consultation period, 54 submissions and comments were received from a broad range of stakeholders such as the Sustainable Development Advisory Council and the [*Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development*](#), as well as the general public, industry, professional associations, Aboriginal organizations, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, and environmental non-governmental organizations.

This document identifies and highlights opinions, concerns and trends that emerged from the comments and submissions on the draft 2013–2016 FSDS. The order in which the comments are provided is not intended to represent priority of importance.

Support for Improvements in the 2013–2016 FSDS

Many respondents were supportive of the draft 2013–2016 FSDS, noting significant advancements since the first FSDS was tabled in October 2010. They also recognized the value of tracking and reporting on progress in the 2012 [*FSDS Progress Report*](#).

Respondents acknowledged the government's efforts to expand the whole-of-government framework of goals, targets and implementation strategies, and commented positively on the addition of new commitments in the draft 2013–2016 FSDS, especially noting that it included a climate change adaptation target in Theme I. They also said the themes addressing Nature and Shrinking the Government's Environmental Footprint were better articulated in the draft 2013–2016 FSDS than in the first cycle of the Strategy.

Respondents said using Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART) criteria to develop targets was encouraging, noting that while a number of targets were more specific and measurable, there was still some room for improvement. They said including the [*Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators*](#) in the 2013–2016 Strategy was a positive step forward.

Respondents were supportive of making environmental decision-making more transparent and accountable through the FSDS. Some respondents suggested expanding the number of voluntary departments and agencies contributing to the FSDS to broaden the whole-of-government picture of environmental sustainability actions.

Many respondents mentioned the importance of taking into account sustainable development aspects when making policy and program decisions, and wanted further details on how the federal government has integrated sustainable development into decision-making.

It was also acknowledged that sustainable development was framed in a much more balanced and effective way in the new Strategy, especially the Government of Canada's continued commitment to integrate economic, environmental and social factors in decision-making. Also appreciated was the social and economic context provided in the 2012 Progress Report, and respondents called for more emphasis on those aspects going forward.

Environmental Issues Raised by Canadians

Respondents to the public consultations emphasized the importance of the environment and sustainable development, and shared their views and opinions on a wide range of environmental issues. They also provided recommendations for possible solutions, including suggestions for new policies, programs, scientific research, collaborations and other initiatives.

For example, some of the topics and suggestions raised include encouraging more actions to accelerate reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, providing support for infrastructure-related projects, considering northern issues, addressing water levels in the Great Lakes, considering the economic costs required for Canadians to adapt to climate change, and reducing the impacts of climate change on water quality and human health.

Many respondents focused on energy issues, offering solutions ranging from updating the National Building Code for new commercial buildings to providing more support for alternative fuels for vehicles and related infrastructure, and working with industry to find ways to increase transportation efficiency and sustainability.

A number of comments were received regarding nature-related issues, ranging from potential new projects and partnerships with other jurisdictions and sectors on species at risk, migratory birds and environmental emergencies that go beyond the program activities currently included in the FSDS, to increasing conservation measures at park boundaries and providing support for green infrastructure.

Some respondents provided suggestions for reducing the federal government's environmental footprint. For example, local and fair trade products/providers could be included in the Green Procurement Policy and new technologies could be applied to GHGs and water use.

Improving Coverage of Environmental Issues in the 2013–2016 FSDS

Theme I: Addressing Climate Change and Air Quality

Climate change issues received the most attention in comments and submissions received during the consultation period. Respondents were pleased to see specific targets for reducing Canada's and the federal government's GHG emissions in the draft FSDS, but recommended including

more climate change mitigation actions, such as clean transportation and clean technology initiatives.

In addition, respondents noted the importance of climate change in the other themes of the FSDS (e.g. water) and encouraged improvements of these linkages. Climate change adaptation was recognized as a critical issue, and respondents acknowledged adding an adaptation target in the Strategy but recommended increasing coverage of the challenges resulting from the consequences of climate change.

On the air quality front, several respondents commented on air pollution and emphasized links with human health.

Many respondents identified energy as a priority issue for environmental sustainability. They emphasized the need to highlight energy efficiency and renewable energy in the FSDS as priority areas for the federal government. They also commented on the monitoring efforts in the oil sands region, asking that this monitoring cover a broader range of issues than just water.

Some suggested that including a more comprehensive suite of federal resource development initiatives would help the FSDS communicate a more complete plan of what the government is doing regarding environmental sustainability issues. Others underlined how important it is to profile the role of Canada's resource industries in environmental stewardship and innovation.

Theme II: Maintaining Water Quality and Availability

Numerous comments focused on the water quality section, such as expanding actions to monitor or reduce water pollution, and requesting the adding of definitions and explanations of water quality activities addressed in the FSDS.

Theme III: Protecting Nature

Respondents focused on the importance of conserving protected areas, species at risk, ecosystem health and natural resources. International and domestic coordination initiatives (e.g. the Convention on Biological Diversity, a National Conservation Plan) were viewed positively, and ongoing collaboration with partners was encouraged.

Respondents commented that the FSDS was missing federal programming in the areas of environmental emergencies and contaminated sites, and expressed interest in learning more about oil sands monitoring of ecosystem health.

Recognizing the role of Canada's agriculture sector in sustainable development, several respondents identified some agricultural issues that could be highlighted in the FSDS (e.g. protecting ecosystem services such as water quality, biodiversity and habitat in agricultural landscapes). Some challenges such as disappearing grasslands, and water consumption by the

agricultural sector, were also raised, along with potential solutions related to providing support for stewardship in working landscapes.

Theme IV: Shrinking the Environmental Footprint – Beginning with Government

Respondents recognized improvements to this theme since the first Strategy (e.g. establishing specific goals and targets) and requested clarification regarding the way in which the number of federal government buildings and fleets were portrayed in the text in Theme IV of the draft Strategy.

Improvements to Targets and Implementation Strategies

Respondents commented on several aspects of the goals, targets and implementation strategies in the FSDS. First, while many respondents liked the objective of SMART targets, opinions differed as to the success of many targets in meeting the SMART criteria. In general, respondents said that targets could be improved to be clearer, more specific and more measurable.

Other respondents suggested that clarifying the relationship between the goals, targets and implementation strategies would improve the FSDS. In some cases, they said that the goals were too aspirational, with targets set too far in the future (i.e. interim targets should be considered, where possible). Finally, some respondents recommended making targets and implementation strategies more understandable by defining terms used.

Recognizing Collaboration

Respondents acknowledged that the 2013–2016 FSDS provided an improved explanation of the role of the federal government in implementing environmental sustainability in Canada. There was, however, a call for more emphasis on the roles that provincial, territorial, municipal and Aboriginal governments, the private sector, and all Canadian citizens play in meeting Canada's sustainability objectives. Respondents said continued recognition of the role of other stakeholders in advancing sustainable development would help to ensure coherence and coordination of environmental sustainability initiatives in Canada.

Communication

Some respondents viewed the draft Strategy as a technical document that is challenging for people to read and understand, particularly the relationship between the goals, targets and implementation strategies and how the information in the narrative section relates to the detailed implementation strategies in the Annex. Others suggested that identifying priority actions by

theme would allow readers to more easily track results, and more clearly articulating goals and targets for the general public would help with transparency.

Respondents also called for a more deliberate discussion in the FSDS's narrative on how stakeholder suggestions were considered in preparing the Strategy. Others asked for more contextual information, such as data on economic and social trends to help the reader understand the driving forces at play when the Strategy is being developed.

Several specific suggestions were made on how to enhance the Strategy's communication effectiveness. Some recommended that the FSDS provide a strong executive summary highlighting federal priorities up front, while others encouraged Environment Canada to make the document and the accompanying FSDS Progress Report more visible to all Canadians and stakeholders (e.g. have a website where the public could access environmental trends data). They also asked that key terms used in the Strategy be clearly defined, and to simplify priority actions by providing five or six major actions for each theme.

Measurability

Respondents acknowledged their support for how measurement and reporting is incorporated in the FSDS and Progress Reports. They said that tracking progress is very important, and that communicating this enhances transparency and accountability. They called for more direct connections between the Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators (CESI) and the FSDS goals and targets.

Many respondents supported the CESI program's expansion as a contribution to reporting on the state of the environment. They also asked for third-party verification of results and suggested that the Strategy include more details about access to data sources, methods and historical data, and continue to note improvements or declines in indicators. Several respondents suggested including an indicator on climate change adaptation.

Social and Economic Dimensions of Sustainable Development

Although the purpose of the Act is to improve the transparency of environmental decision-making, a common recommendation for the FSDS was that it should communicate sustainable development linkages more clearly. Specifically, respondents said the FSDS should integrate social and economic aspects in the Strategy through its indicators, goals and targets, and its articulation of government priorities. Several respondents commented that "sustainable development" should be clearly defined in the FSDS, recognizing the linkages between the environment, economy and society. Another suggestion was to include more context regarding

economic and social trends that are driving change, as this would help with integrated decision-making for environmental sustainability initiatives.

Looking Forward

There were some suggestions regarding changes to the FSDS that may take a number of cycles to implement, such as including financial information associated with the implementation strategies, and developing a system to track integrated decision-making across government, with potentially adding a target in this area. As well, a number of respondents called for activities that are better suited to future FSDS progress reporting, such as making more links between human health and the environment. Also, some respondents suggested linking CESI to other measurement systems (e.g. the Global Reporting Initiative) and comparing Canadian data to other comparable international jurisdictions.

All comments and recommendations from the 120-day public consultations on the draft 2013–2016 FSDS have been carefully reviewed and taken into consideration when preparing the final Strategy. The final [2013–2016 FSDS](#) is available online and includes a section on how input received through the public consultation process was used in finalizing the Strategy (see [Chapter 2](#)). You are invited to review this section, and the FSDS as a whole, to see how consultation comments helped to improve the final product.

www.ec.gc.ca

Additional information can be obtained at:

Environment Canada

Inquiry Centre

10 Wellington Street, 23rd Floor

Gatineau QC K1A 0H3

Telephone: 1-800-668-6767 (in Canada only) or 819-997-2800

Fax: 819-994-1412

TTY: 819-994-0736

Email: enviroinfo@ec.gc.ca