

# Environmental Assessment

**IT'S IN  
OUR HANDS**



Canadian Environmental  
Assessment Agency

Agence canadienne  
d'évaluation environnementale

Canadians want a strong economy, jobs and a healthy environment. To achieve this, we need a powerful planning tool; something every citizen can use; something to help us achieve sustainable development something called environmental assessment. Public participation is a key element of environmental assessment and the sooner we get involved, the better. It's in our hands.

## ■ Better Decisions

Environmental assessment is about making better decisions. It's about providing decision makers with the kind of information they need to ensure that projects are compatible with a healthy, sustainable environment for both present and future generations.

Environmental assessment is now part of public decision making at all levels of government in Canada and is used in over 60 countries and in many international organizations and funding agencies. Canada in the early 1970s was among the first countries to practice environmental assessment. Since then Canada has been recognized internationally as a leader in the field.

The Government of Canada made a strong commitment to environmental assessment as a means of achieving sustainable development. In January 1995 it implemented the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* and its regulations. The Act replaced the 1984 *Environmental Assessment and Review Process Guidelines Order*.

Briefly, the Act requires that an environmental assessment be conducted before a federal authority:

- carries out the project;
- provides financial assistance to enable the project to be carried out;
- sells, leases or otherwise transfers control or administration of land to enable the project to be carried out; or
- issues a licence, permit or other authorization included in the *Law List Regulations* to enable the project to be carried out.

## ■ The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency

The Act establishes the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency as a central, independent body of government to administer the new federal environmental assessment process. The Agency reports directly to the Minister of the Environment. It replaces the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office. Its mission:

To provide effective means of integrating environmental factors into federal planning and decision-making in a manner that takes into account public values and the goal of sustainable development.

The Agency assists federal departments and agencies to implement the Act and provides administrative support to environmental assessment mediators and panels.

## ■ Degree of Assessment

The Act establishes four types of assessment to provide flexibility in assessing different types of projects. The types of assessment are:

- screening
- comprehensive study
- review by a mediator
- review by a panel

More than 99 per cent of federal environmental assessments are conducted by federal authorities through screenings and comprehensive studies. Projects subject to comprehensive study where a federal decision is needed are set out in the *Comprehensive Study List Regulations*. These projects were selected because their scale and complexity, as well as their potential to cause adverse environmental effects, require more in-depth study. Similarly, the *Exclusion List Regulations* set out projects which do not require environmental assessment pursuant to the Act because their environmental effects are judged to be insignificant. Under certain circumstances, screenings and comprehensive studies can be referred for further assessment. The small number of projects requiring further assessment are conducted by a mediator or a panel appointed by the Minister of the Environment, Panels usually comprise three persons.

## ■ Promoting Efficiency

A panel review, in certain cases, may be conducted jointly with a province or other jurisdiction. The Minister of the Environment may also allow another federal process to be substituted for a panel review under the Act. Such practices promote efficiency, avoid duplication and save time. The federal government has concluded environmental assessment harmonization agreements with a number of provinces.

## ■ The Report to Decision makers

Following an environmental assessment, a report is prepared. The responsible authority makes the decision about the significance of the adverse environmental effects of a project in the case of screenings, and whether or not further assessment is required. This decision is made by the Minister of the Environment for each comprehensive study. In the case of mediations or panel reviews, the federal Cabinet determines whether federal support will be provided for a project on the basis of the findings and recommendations contained in the report.

## ■ Public Participation

Public involvement promotes an open and balanced environmental assessment process; it strengthens the quality and credibility of assessments. The level of public involvement varies with each type of environmental assessment. While public participation is most visible during a panel review, the public may also take part in comprehensive studies and mediations; and in screenings, at the discretion of the responsible authority.

### The Public Registry

The Public Registry is an important means of ensuring that environmental assessment information is accessible to the public. It also promotes public involvement in the process.

The *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* directs responsible authorities to maintain a registry of all the records produced, collected or submitted in relation to the environmental assessment of a project; and the Agency for projects assessed by a mediator or a panel.

One way of accessing the documents on each of the project registries is through the Federal Environmental Assessment Index, the master index of federal environmental assessments being carried out under the Act. The index, updated monthly by the Agency, contains basic data (what, when, where) and provides contacts for additional information on the assessments or to obtain documents. It is available on CD-ROM or in paper copy in most public libraries across Canada. The index can also be consulted on the Internet at [http:// www.ceaa.gc.ca](http://www.ceaa.gc.ca); and on Web, Canada's on-line non-profit communications network.

## Participant Funding

Another means of promoting effective public participation is the Participant Funding Program. It is a limited fund to help concerned citizens and groups take part in key stages of the review process by a panel or a mediator.

## ■ Public Information

Our staff will be pleased to provide you with additional information. Please call or fax us at any of the following locations:

### The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency

Head Office, Hull, Quebec

(819) 997-1000

(819) 953-2891 (FAX)

Vancouver

(604) 666-2434

(604) 666-6990 (FAX)

Edmonton

(403) 495-6434

(403) 495-4557 (FAX)

Winnipeg

(204) 983-5127

(204) 983-4506 (FAX)

Halifax

(902) 426-0564

(902) 426-6530 (FAX)

The information in this folder is based on the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*. For more detail and greater precision, please refer to the legal text.

(Aussi disponible *en français*)



Canada