

# **The Use of Public Advisory Committees in Environmental Planning: A Case Analysis**

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## ABSTRACT

The use of public advisory committees (**PACs**) as a method of involving the public in environmental planning processes, although not new, is still in the experimental stages. Proponents and consultants are trying various formats and levels of public involvement in decision-making and, to date, very little research has been done to examine current practice. This paper is intended to begin this review process. Three examples of environmental planning processes using **PACs** are studied: the Metropolitan Toronto Remedial Action Plan process, the Metropolitan Toronto Solid Waste Environmental Assessment Plan process, and the Ontario Hydro Big Chute Generating Station Redevelopment project. The purpose of this paper is to understand each **PAC's** organization, structure, process, and context and to identify the strengths and weaknesses within each of these categories. The major conclusions of this paper include a discussion of the roles of the facilitator, decision-makers, and stakeholders and of the start-up phase of a PAC as crucial to creating, operating, and maintaining a PAC and to using **PACs** in a manner which is beneficial for all involved. It is hoped that the principles and conclusions presented in this paper may be applied in future practice to improve the use of **PACs** as a method of involving the public in environmental planning processes.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Public involvement programs are increasingly important components of environmental planning processes. Proponents are approving the use of a wide spectrum of public consultation activities. These range from newsletters and open houses, used to inform the public of a project's progress and to solicit feedback at specific points in the process, to public advisory committees (PACs), used to involve the public in decision-making throughout the planning process.

The use of the latter method, although not new, is still in the experimental stages. Proponents and consultants are trying various formats and levels of public involvement in decision-making and, to date, very little research has been done to examine current practice. This major paper is intended to begin this review process. Three examples of environmental planning processes using PACs are studied to understand each PAC's organization, structure, and process and to identify their strengths and weaknesses within each of these three categories. Also, the contexts within which the PACs exist (e.g., the types of environmental planning processes, etc.) are reviewed.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. As mentioned above, it begins a review of PACs as a method of involving the public in environmental decision-making. It is hoped that more reviews of this nature will be performed. Also, based on the strengths and weaknesses of existing PACs as identified in the case studies, key principles and conclusions regarding the use of PACs are presented. It is hoped that these principles and conclusions may be applied in future practice to improve the use of PACs as a method of involving the public in environmental planning processes.

#### **Public Advisory Committees**

Public advisory committees (PACs) have their historic roots in the days of early settlement when citizens raised issues and discussed planning strategies in schools, town meetings, and other gathering places (Draper 1977). The demand for increased public involvement in government decision-making grew out of an increasing number of confrontations, such as pickets, marches, and sit-ins (Draper 1977). In response to the increasing number of public confrontations, government proponents of community projects began providing limited opportunities for public involvement. The citizen advisory committee was one of the first methods used. It is unclear when Canada began organizing PACs for environmental policy and planning purposes but citizen

input was sought as early as 1954 during the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway (Draper 1978).

Unfortunately, early forms of public advisory committees have been recognized as false attempts at genuine citizen participation. Citizen advisory committees (CACs) formed in the 1960s were characterized more as “public relations vehicles” and “rubberstamps” where the decision-makers “educated, persuaded, and advised the citizens, not the reverse” (Arnstein 1969:216). Draper (1977:39) identifies with Arnstein’s analysis, noting:

That a government organization establishes a citizen’s advisory committee, when none previously existed, is likely a positive step. But the situation is still not one of full participation where one group gives advice and another group has the option of not taking the advice and retains the power of making decisions.

Today, the public is more wary of the potential misuse of their time and advice. More and more, people are “demanding genuine levels of participation to assure them that public programs are relevant to their needs and responsive to their priorities” (Arnstein 1969:216).

While problems still remain, PACs are widely used in environmental planning and decision-making processes. Before elaborating on this point, it is worthwhile to identify several types of PACs which exist:

- citizen advisory committees (CACs)- committees whose membership may include citizens and representatives from neighbourhood organizations, ratepayer associations, or public and environmental interest groups. CACs are usually created to advise decision-makers in a planning process.
- public advisory committees/public liaison committees (PLCs)- committees with individual citizens, representatives from public and environmental interest organizations, and representatives from other publics (e.g., with economic interests or government agencies, etc.) which may have an interest or stake in the outcome of a planning process. The role of PLCs is most often advisory; expanded decision-making authority may be given.
- task forces/workshops - committees with members of relevant interests to address a specific issue. These committees are often shorter-lived than PLCs and may develop recommendations for presentation to a decision-making body.
- monitoring committees - committees with members of the public, decision-makers, and regulators whose primary function is to monitor the implementation of a plan or decision and to serve as a watchdog. The committees often serve as a means to resolve subsequent issues which may arise as a result of a plan’s, program’s, or policy’s implementation.

- stakeholder committees - “Stakeholders are those groups who have a vital interest in the issue, will be directly affected by the outcome, and/or make an important contribution to its resolution” (The Niagara Institute c.1986:26). This definition implies that the decision-makers are regular and active members of the committee and that the committee works together to develop solutions that become the joint, consensus-based decision. A greater degree of power sharing is more likely to exist in a stakeholder committee than the advisory committees described above.

The boundaries between these committees are vague. This is more a result of people’s varying interpretations of the above terms in practice than in the literature. For example, a group may name a PAC a stakeholder committee when, in actuality, its role is that of a public liaison committee. Because clear distinctions between the terms have not been made in the literature and enforced in practice, this confusion is likely to persist. Actually, relatively little has been written about PACs, which is ironic given their long history and widespread use.

Although the term “PAC” often refers to the specific type of committee defined above, for the purposes of this paper, the term “PAC” will be used as an umbrella term to include all committees described above and “public advisory committee,” when spelled out, will refer to the specific type of committee by that name.

Most PACs, whatever the type, have several distinct characteristics in common. These include, but are not limited to the following (Creighton and Delli Priscolli 1983):

- PACs are usually an appointed body with a direct tie or relationship to the agency which created it.
- PACs are usually formed to assist in a decision-making process, the extent to which a PAC shares decision-making power is distinct to each PAC.
- PACs are usually voluntary; at best expenses may be paid but salaries are not.
- PACs are usually ad hoc, formed for a specific purpose and lasting only as long as the process lasts (however, this may be years and may extend into the implementation of a plan that the PAC has helped develop, thus evolving into a monitoring and/or implementing capacity).
- PAC members are usually sought in one of four ways: by the agency identifying people, by a neutral third party identifying people, by the agency or neutral third party identifying interests and allowing groups to select representatives, or by a combination of the above methods.
- PACs are usually relatively small; any more than 15 to 20 people may be too large to be productive. Subcommittees may need to be organized if a larger PAC is formed.

- the members usually represent or reflect several interests. Even in CACs, the citizens usually have more than one interest at stake (e.g., farming and family interests, environmental and farming interests, etc.).

In practice, **PACs** have met with mixed results. While **PACs** are looked upon with great potential and some experiences have been positive, some PAC members and agency personnel have become disillusioned with their individual experiences, in part or altogether. Reasons for their dissatisfaction are numerous and depend upon the specific circumstances. Some of the problems which **PACs** may encounter include (Bonner 1980):

- lack of trained staff or enough staff
- improper direction
- lack of funds
- imposed silence (muzzling **PACs**)
- reactive only function (the rubberstamp syndrome)
- poorly designated procedures
- unclear goals and tasks
- incomplete or poor information (keep members in the dark)
- rigged selection of committee members
- lack of issues with which the committee can deal
- unrealistic timeframes
- lack of PAC credibility
- lack of access to decision-makers or agency personnel
- wrong agency assumptions about group members' abilities.

The rest of this paper will be devoted to exploring three case studies where **PACs** are used as one of several methods to involve the public in environmental planning processes. These are the Multistakeholder Committee (MSC) for the Metropolitan Toronto Solid Waste Environmental Assessment Plan, the public advisory committee for the Toronto Harbour Remedial Action Plan, and the public workshop and seminars for the Ontario Hydro Big Chute generating station redevelopment project. Specifically, the **PACs'** organization and structure, the processes they have followed, and their contexts will be reviewed and analyzed. In the end, a set of recommendations will be presented aimed at overcoming some of the problems identified and building upon the strengths. The hope is to shed some light on how **PACs** may be better used in the future so that the experience is beneficial for everyone involved.

## Chapter 2 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

### **Approach**

In approaching the task of examining the use of PACs in environmental planning processes, the term “use” must be defined. How are PACs being used? To answer this question, it is necessary to look at three elements which contribute to the concept of “use:” organization, structure, and process. Cormick (1988) identifies these three elements as critical in the use of alternative dispute settlement processes, such as environmental mediation and negotiation. He uses the terms “developing the process,” “structure,” and “implementation,” respectively corresponding to the terms used in this paper. Each of these must be addressed if a dispute settlement process has any hope of being successful (Cormick 1988). Likewise, these elements need to be addressed if PACs are to be used in a manner which is beneficial to all those involved. Much of what Cormick (1988) explains with respect to each element applies to PACs as well as to environmental mediation and negotiation. Hence, several of his points are used in support of the following discussion.

### **PAC Organization**

Answers to the following questions provide insight into a PAC's origins: How was the PAC organized? What are its origins? Why was this particular method of public involvement chosen? What approvals were needed to proceed with the development of the PAC? Who was involved in selecting this method? What difficulties were encountered? Cormick (1988:41) notes that “the least promising way to develop a system is to import it from elsewhere.” Each process of development must be conducted case by case, tailoring it to the specific circumstances surrounding the planning process. Cormick suggests that dispute settlement processes should be the result of negotiation themselves, and the same approach would appear to be advisable for the development and organization of PACs. Namely, key parties should be involved, the legitimacy of all participants should be recognized, and the resulting system to put the PAC in place and to maintain it should reflect the concerns and realities of those it is expected to serve (Cormick 1988).



### PAC Structure

Key questions with respect to structure include: What is the structure? What is the rationale for selecting a particular structure? Who decided the structure? What resources are guaranteed? Who will participate in the PAC? How will their involvement be sought and obtained? Other points raised by Cormick (1988) include: Is the structure flexible to be able to adapt to the realities of a particular situation? Does the structure complement the decision-making processes within which the PAC will operate?

### PAC Process

This element is especially critical. It includes the following factors: How often are meetings held? What procedures and groundrules are established? How are meetings run? What procedures are in place to ensure that information is provided to the PAC by the agency and received by the agency from the PAC? What communication links are established between the agency, decision-makers, and the PAC? Between the PAC and the members' constituencies? What input will the PAC have in decision-making? Who does the PAC want to influence? What decisions does the PAC want to influence? Cormick (1988:41) adds that the parties (i.e., PAC members) should be involved in overseeing the direction of their process within the overall planning process. He explains, "This helps keep the process legitimate in the eyes of the ... parties and helps to maintain some level of independence for the process." Second, Cormick (1988) stresses the importance of the skill of those responsible for the initial implementation and administration of the process. The start-up phase of any group is usually shaky and is probably the most critical part of the group's existence. If mistrust and inter-party conflicts are not overcome, the group's future may be in jeopardy. A person skilled in facilitation, group dynamics, and conflict management techniques and who is sensitive to the circumstances (political, social, environmental) is imperative. Third, Cormick (1988) points out that early success will be critical. This applies to not only environmental mediation processes but also PAC processes. Whether it is simply identifying initial topics for discussion and projects and beginning work or actually making a set of decisions, strategizing and seeking their acceptance, the PAC members' recognition of forward movement and increasing momentum will give the PAC a good, solid start. Carefully selecting initial issues to address is crucial, however, because members are wary of each other, mistrust may exist, and conflicts may flare easily in the early stages of a PAC's existence.

These three elements form the framework for examining how PACs are used in the case studies. The elements are summarized in Table 1. Another element that is examined and which relates to the use of PACs is the context in which each PAC exists. Specifically, what is the nature of the environmental planning process in which the PAC is used? Also, what other public involvement techniques is the agency employing to supplement the PAC and achieve additional public involvement objectives. Questions of context are also listed in Table 1.

## **Methodology**

Several methods were used to gather information related to each of the elements defining “use.” After selecting the case studies (which are introduced in Chapter 3) a number of tasks were undertaken:

- a survey was designed to administer to the PAC participants, facilitators, and coordinators;
- PAC meetings were attended;
- relevant reports and documents were obtained for each PAC; and
- a list was generated of key resource people involved in the PACs and meetings and telephone interviews were held with each resource person.

## **Survey**

The survey was designed for all participants in the PACs, including the facilitators, coordinators (if one was designated), and community members representing the various interests. Its purpose was to seek the PAC members’ responses to specific questions on the structure and process of the PAC. The general subjects covered by these questions are noted in *italics* in Table 1. The participants possessed a unique first-hand perspective on how their PAC functioned and could provide special insights into their experiences. All items pertaining to the PAC’s origins and context were omitted from the survey because PAC members were not expected to have specific knowledge of them (these are the non-italicized items in Table 1). They formed the basis for open-ended meetings and telephone interviews with key resource people.

## **PAC Meetings**

Several PAC meetings were observed. The purpose was to gain, through first-hand experience, a better understanding of each PAC’s structure and process and of the context in which each PAC existed.

Table 1: FRAMEWORK USED IN THE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

ELEMENTS	FACTORS	QUESTIONS
<b>Organization*</b>	Conception of <b>PAC</b>	How was the idea to form a <b>PAC</b> conceived? Was public input sought?
	Obtaining Approvals and Budget	Was upper management support difficult to obtain? Was a sufficient budget allocated for the PAC?
	Determining Structure	How was the structure determined? Was the public involved in determining the structure?
	Inviting Participation	Who were identified as the stakeholders? How were they invited to participate in the PAC? Was <b>it difficult</b> to obtain commitments?
<b>Structure*</b>	Format	<i>What is the format of the PAC?</i> <i>What are the advantages and disadvantages to this format?</i> <i>Does the format facilitate getting work done well?</i> <i>Does the format facilitate completing tasks in a timely manner?</i>
	Representation	How many people are involved in the PAC? Are all interests represented?
	Resources	What are the PAC's resources? Are they in <b>sufficient</b> supply?
	Reporting Structure	Who does the PAC report to? <i>Is it a good reporting structure?</i>
<b>Process*</b>	Groundrules	<i>What, if any, groundrules does the PAC follow?</i> <i>What, if any, <b>groundrules</b> should be change&amp;added?</i>
	Objectives and Tasks	<i>What are the objectives and functions of the PAC?</i>
	Meetings	How often are meetings held? What are the advantages and disadvantages to PAC meetings ?
	Influence	Who/What does the PAC want to influence?
	Facilitation	How are meetings run? Who facilitates them?
<b>Context*</b>	Organizational Structure	Has the structure of the sponsoring agency affected the PAC's work?
	Planning Process	Has the nature of the planning process affected the PAC's role?
	Communication with Constituencies	<i>How often do PAC members communicate with their constituencies ?</i>
	Other Public Involvement Activities	What other public involvement activities are conducted?

NOTES:

\*For each element, general questions regarding suggestions for improvement in relevant factors were asked.

-items in italics formed the basis for the survey. Non-italic items formed the basis for open-ended interviews with key resource people.

### Written Documents

Each PAC had several supporting documents which provided specific insights into the PAC's organization and origins, structure, process, and context. Terms of reference, public involvement guidelines, evaluations, and other informative documents were gathered. A complete list of relevant documents is included in the bibliography.

### Key Resource People

Meetings and telephone interviews were held with several key resource people to gather information on the context, organization, structure, and process of each PAC. The non-italicized items in Table 1 served as the basis for the open-ended interviews. However, the discussions were not limited to these topics.

Using these methods -- surveys, meetings, telephone interviews, document reviews, and observation of PAC meetings -- a great deal of information on each PAC's organization, structure, process, and context was gathered. The analysis and findings of this study are presented in the following chapters.

### Chapter 3 INTRODUCTION TO THE THREE CASE STUDIES

Each PAC is introduced through a brief discussion of their origins, structure, and process. More details on each case study may be found in Dockstator (1990).

#### **Metropolitan Toronto Remedial Action Plan Public Advisory Committee**

The Toronto Harbour (Figure 1) is one of 42 Areas of Concern designated by the International Joint Commission (IJC) as "pollution hotspots" (Miller 1987) requiring remedial action to restore water quality. Development of a remedial action plan (RAP) is an environmental planning process which was established to achieve this goal and includes public participation in its mandate,

Support for establishing a public advisory committee as one method of involving the public grew out of a workshop held in October 1989. A group of interested citizens met with a facilitator to develop the public advisory committee's two-tiered structure which is depicted in Figure 2. Initially, sectors representing the various interests met and selected representatives for participation on the public advisory committee. While no limit was placed on sector membership, the number of public advisory committee members was limited. Table 2 summarizes each sector's membership and number of active participants. Of the total, there are approximately 25-30 individuals who were selected to be members of the public advisory committee.

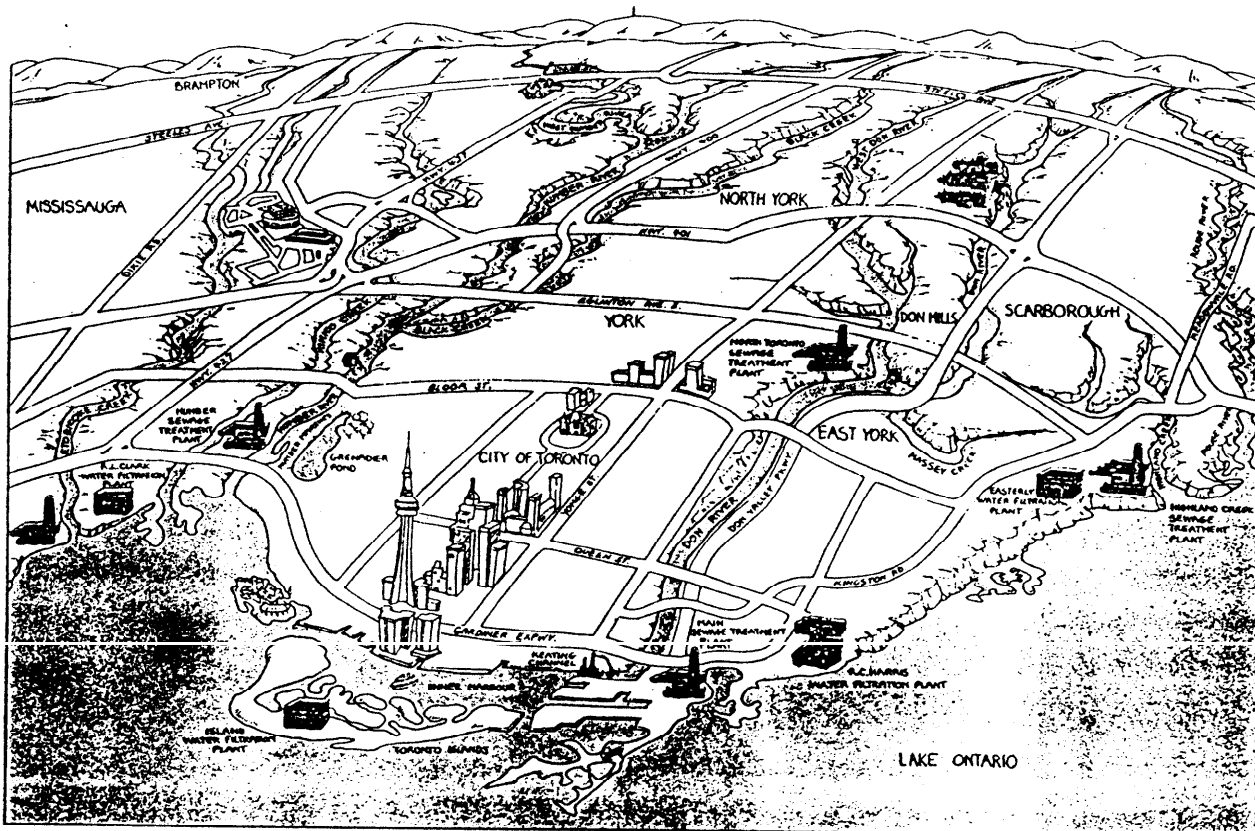
#### **APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN SECTORS**

Table 2: APPROXIMATE <b>NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN SECTORS</b> <sup>1</sup>		
<u>Caucus</u>	<u>Total Number</u>	<u>Average Number</u>
Environmental Organizations	70	5
Community Groups/Individuals	600	9-10
Recreation/Tourism	30	4-5
Municipal Government	21	3*
Business	40	3*
Labour	5	3"
Agriculture	3	3*
Toronto Harbour Commissioners	1	1"
Metro Toronto and Region Conservation Authority	1	1*

<sup>1</sup> All numbers are estimates. Source: Martin, personal communication.

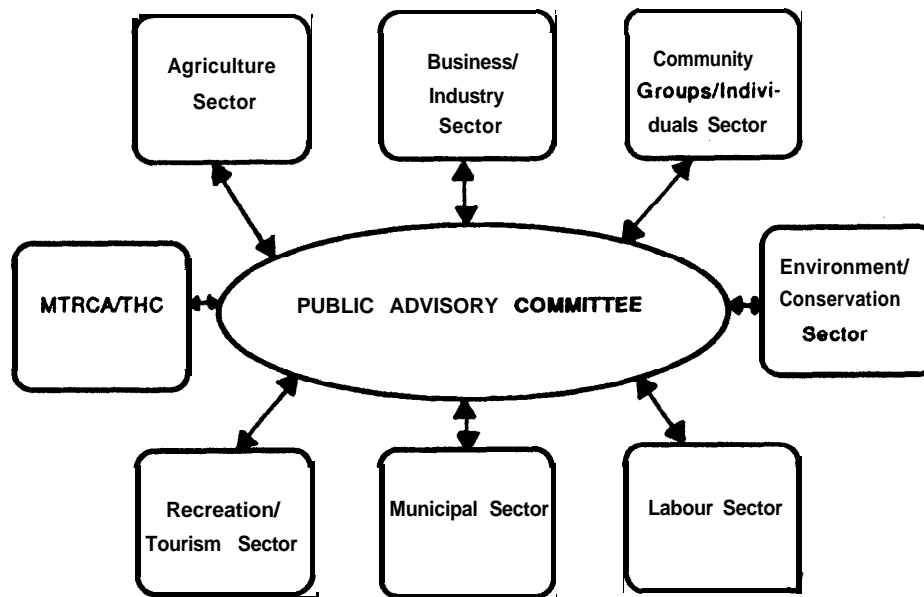
. These sectors meet irregularly, if at all. The PAC representatives provide input through attendance at PAC meetings and phone call discussions with the facilitator.

Figure. 1: THE METRO TORONTO HARBOUR AREA OF CONCERN  
 ('Source: Environment Canada and MOE 1989)



The Metro Toronto Remedial Action Plan covers the Lake Ontario waterfront falling within Metro, as well as all the rivers and creeks and their watersheds between Etobicoke Creek in the west and the Rouge River in the east.

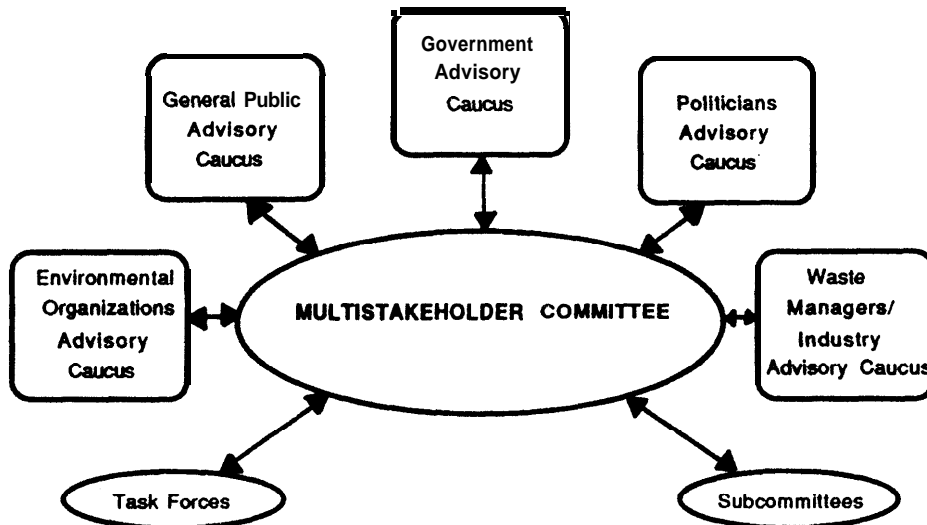
Figure 2: STRUCTURE OF RAP PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE



**NOTES**

- Representatives from each sector are chosen by sector members to serve on the public advisory committee.
- Source: Martin, personal communication; RAP surveys

Figure 3: STRUCTURE OF SWEAP MSC



**NOTES:**

- Three representatives from each advisory caucus are chosen by caucus members to serve on the MSC.
- Representatives from the MSC and advisory caucuses may serve on task forces and subcommittees.
- Task forces, subcommittees, and advisory caucuses report directly to the MSG.

Source: Blackwell, personal communication; MSC surveys

The summary below outlines the process followed by the Metro Toronto RAP public advisory committee:

- A chairman selected by the group chairs the meetings. The facilitator records the meetings' discussions and provides input where necessary. He does not facilitate the meetings.
- Public advisory committee meetings are held monthly and sectors meet only when they have agenda items.
- Initial meetings were very task-oriented; they focussed on reaching consensus on what the goals of the Metro Toronto RAP should be. Little time was spent orienting the participants to the RAP process as this was done at sector meetings and on the telephone.
- The RAP team coordinator, the individual responsible for overseeing the technical work and writing the RAP, attends all meetings so that he can update the group on the RAP's progress and obtain input directly from its members.
- The public advisory committee determines how its budget is to be spent. While all expenditures are subject to the approval of the RAP team coordinator, they are usually allowed as long as they adhere to the RAP goals.
- The public advisory committee established the goals of the Metro Toronto RAP, developed and implemented an outreach program to raise the profile of the committee and the RAP process, and reviews and provides input on documents and studies prepared for the RAP.

#### **Metro Toronto Solid Waste Environmental Assessment Plan (SWEAP) Multistakeholder Committee (MSC)**

In 1987, Metropolitan Toronto began a process to develop a 20 to 40 year master plan for managing and disposing of the solid waste produced by commercial, industrial, and residential activities. The name for Metro Toronto's master plan is SWEAP, Solid Waste Environmental Assessment Plan, and as is evident by this name, it is subject to the provincial environmental assessment (EA) process. The Metro Works Department, the designated proponent of the project, developed an extensive public involvement program which included the formation of a Multistakeholder Committee (MSC). The structure of the MSC is depicted in Figure 3. It includes five advisory caucuses and a number of standing and ad hoc subcommittees and task forces. While membership in advisory caucuses is unlimited, the number of MSC members representing an advisory caucus at any time is limited to three, for a total of fifteen MSC members. Table 3 displays the approximate number of members for each caucus and the average number of people who attend caucus meetings.



Table 3: <b>APPROXIMATE</b> NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN ADVISORY CAUCUSES*		
<b><u>Caucus</u></b>	<b><u>Total Number</u></b>	<b><u>Average Number</u></b>
Environmental Organizations	25-30	8-10
General Public	50	10-20
Government	20	15
Politicians	14	4-7
Waste Managers	70	15-30

The summary below outlines the process followed by the SWEAP MSC:

- A facilitator was hired to facilitate meetings and work with the MSC and caucuses to achieve MSC goals.
- The MSC and advisory caucuses meet monthly.
- Initial meetings were devoted to getting to know each other and to understand the SWEAP process, overcoming initial resistance to the process and suspicions of other members, and beginning to address the tasks at hand so that members would feel they were accomplishing something.
- The MSC makes recommendations to the SWEAP Steering Committee on what projects and actions MSC members feel should be undertaken to further SWEAP goals. To be implemented, these recommendations have to go through not only the SWEAP Steering Committee, but also the Metro Works Department before reaching the Metro Works Committee and Metro Council for a vote to approve (and fund) or reject the recommendation.
- The MSC has undertaken several projects. These include:
  - projects related to the development of the master plan, such as requesting a waste composition study and reviewing SWEAP reports;
  - projects which the MSC feels require immediate attention, such as recommending a public education program to inform the public how they can reduce the amount of waste being generated, recommending a reduction in packaging policy, recommending that the Metro Toronto government change its purchasing policy to increase the amount of recycled and recyclable products it purchases, recommending that steps be taken to market recycled and recyclable materials, and investigating MSC's role in the Greater Toronto Area Solid Waste Management Plan process (GTA); and
  - attempts at changing the reporting structure to streamline the approval process and make it more equitable. MSC members felt that their recommendations were not dealt with in a timely manner, in part due to the many steps the recommendations had to go through before reaching the Metro Works Committee.

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<sup>2</sup> All numbers are estimates. Source: Blackwell, personal communication.

### **Ontario Hydro Big Chute Generating Station Redevelopment Project Public Workshop and Seminars**

Through a class EA process, Ontario Hydro began seeking approval in 1987 to redevelop the Big Chute Generating Station (GS) in cottage country (Figure 2). The Big Chute GS was built in the early 1900s with a maximum power output of four megawatts (4 MW) and, after almost 80 years of operation, had gradually deteriorated to the point where redevelopment was necessary.

At first, the Ontario Hydro project team did not plan an extensive public involvement program because the project was proceeding under a Class EA. However, it became evident through the increasing opposition presented by three cottagers associations<sup>3</sup> in particular that something more than a general approach to public involvement would have to be done to address the growing conflict. After several internal discussions, the project team met with representatives from the cottagers associations to discuss pursuing an alternative method of resolving the conflict. The format agreed upon was a workshop, the design of which would be strongly influenced by the cottagers so that Ontario Hydro staff would not be seen as manipulating them.

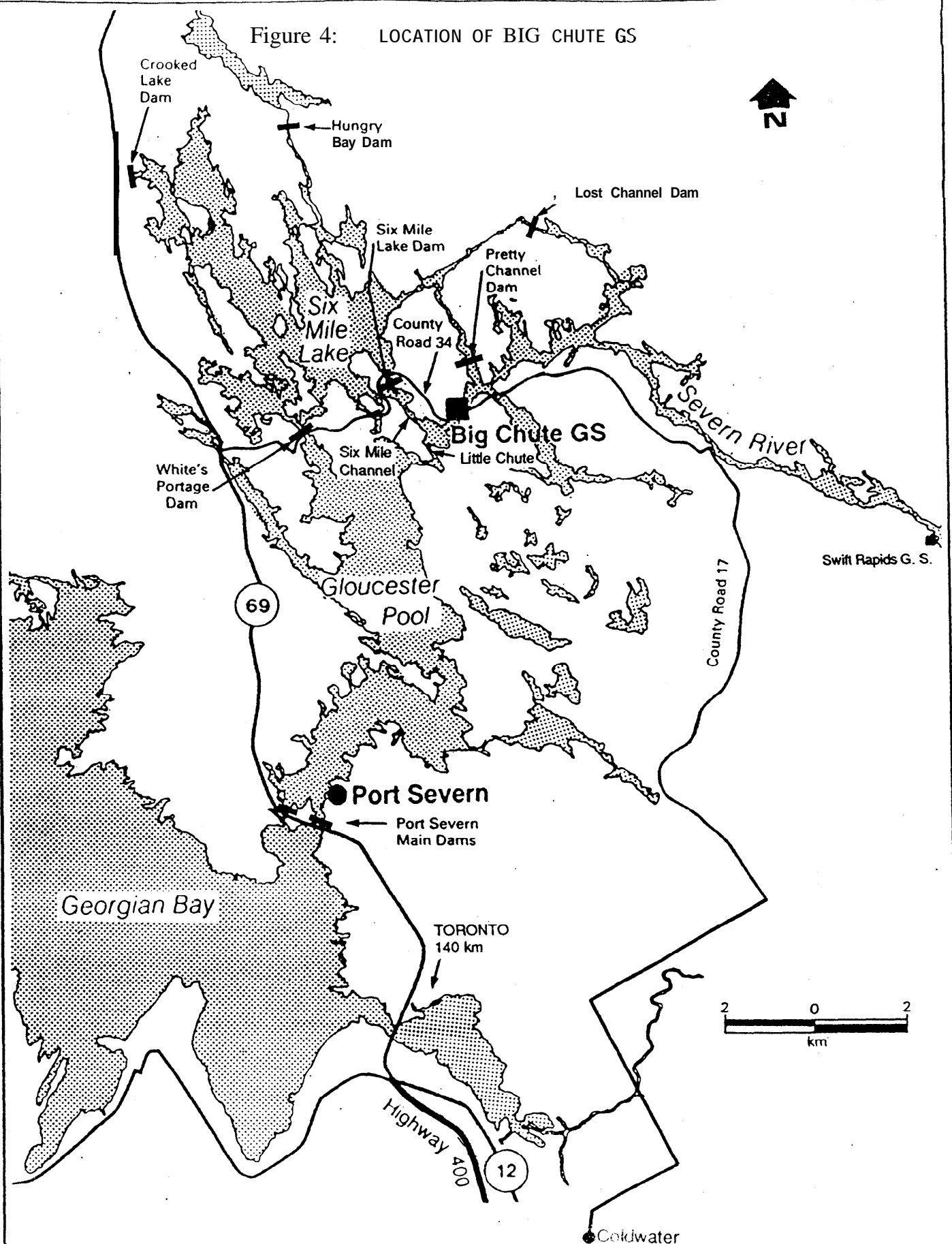
Although the workshop itself may not be considered a “true” PAC, the entire process, consisting of the several meetings to design the workshop and culminating in two evening seminars, the one-day workshop, and subsequent meetings and discussions, may be considered a variation on the theme of PACs. That is, the public advisory committee as a method of involving the public, is used here in a different manner than in the other two case studies in that the structure is smaller, the meetings irregular, and the life of the PAC shorter than the others (among other differences). The workshop approach was never formally **recognized** by Ontario Hydro staff or the cottagers as a PAC *per se*, but it may be referred to as one here as it meets the general definition of one (noted in Chapter 1).

Once the cottagers agreed to the approach, the project team obtained the approvals and funding necessary to proceed. The summary below outlines the process followed for the workshop and seminars:

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<sup>3</sup> Six Mile Lake Cottagers Association, Gloucester Pool Cottagers Association, and East Baxter Ratepayers Association.

Figure 4: LOCATION OF BIG CHUTE GS



(Source: Ontario Hydro 1990)

- Two consultants were hired to facilitate the design and implementation of the workshop process.
- The facilitators held several meetings with representatives from the cottagers associations to set the agenda and format for the one-day workshop. Ontario Hydro's objectives for the process were to review study findings, discuss the cottagers' concerns, discuss possible mitigation measures, and seek consensus on a preferred redevelopment alternative (Ontario Hydro 1989; Barrett and Armour 1989). The cottagers' objective was to identify "... the environmental conditions that they would like to see maintained regardless of which alternative was ultimately chosen" (Barrett and Armour 1989:3).
- Ontario Hydro organized two evening seminars for the cottagers to bring the cottagers "up-to-speed" and to present information on the existing environment, the results of field studies conducted to date, and the environmental implications of the various alternatives.<sup>4</sup>
- The Ministry of Natural Resources, Trent-Severn Waterway (Parks Canada), and the Ministry of Environment (MOE) Environmental Assessment Branch were invited to participate in the seminars and workshop and agreed to attend. The MOE Approvals Branch was also invited but did not attend as it preferred to wait and receive the draft EA rather than participate in the planning process itself. To fill this gap in knowledge Ontario Hydro staff, upon the request and approval of the cottagers, hired a consultant to serve as a source of independent advice for the cottagers.
- Although the one-day workshop (November 26, 1989) was intensive, consensus was reached on several points. No formal, legally-binding agreement was sought, but all parties felt that at the end of the day important commitments had been made.
- A plenary session was held March 9, 1989 to review Ontario Hydro's progress in fulfilling its commitments. While the cottagers appeared satisfied with the results of Ontario Hydro's additional studies, they were not pleased with Ontario Hydro's decision to pursue the ten MW alternative, questioning Ontario Hydro's ability to maintain the environmental conditions specified in the workshop.
- Tension between the cottagers and Ontario Hydro arose because of the ten MW decision. But after the plenary session, Ontario Hydro staff continued to work with the cottagers via one-on-one meetings and telephone conversations.

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<sup>4</sup> The alternatives being studied revolved around redeveloping the generating station as a six MW, eight MW, ten MW, or 12 MW station or leaving the station capacity at four MW.

## Summary

To summarize the differences and similarities of the three case studies, the following table has been prepared:

**Table 4: SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES**

	METRO TORONTO RAP PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE	SWEAP MULTISTAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE	ONTARIO HYDRO BIG CHUTE GS WORKSHOP PROCESS
Environmental Planning Process	Remedial <b>Action</b> Planning	<b>Full</b> Environmental Assessment	Class Environmental Assessment
Mandate of Planning Process	water <b>quality</b> planning; ecosystem approach; regional; <b>environmental rehabilitation</b>	waste management master planning: environmental protection; regional	energy planning; environmental protection: <b>site-specific</b>
Private or Public Agency	<b>public</b>	<b>public</b>	crown corporation
Proponent	Environment Canada/Ontario MOE	Metro Toronto Works Department	Ontario <b>Hydro</b>
Public <b>Involved</b> in PAC Desian	<b>yes</b>	yes	<b>yes</b>
PAC's Structure	<b>2-tiers</b> ; PAC and sectors	<b>2-tiers</b> ; MSC and caucuses	meetings, seminars, workshop
PAC's Site <sup>1</sup>	30	15	19
PAC's Representation	<b>Agriculture</b> ; Business; Community <b>Groups/Individuals</b> ; Environment/ Conservation Groups; Labour; Municipal; Recreation/Tourism; THC; <b>MTRCA**</b>	Environmental Organirattions; General Public; Government: <b>Politicians</b> ; Waste Managers/ <b>Industry</b>	cottagers associations; TSW; MNR; MOE ( <b>EAB</b> );† <b>Ontario Hydro</b>
PAC's Lifespan	<b>long-term</b> ; began 1989	long-term; began 1987	<b>short-term</b> ; 1 0/88-3/89 <b>plus</b> follow-up meetings, phone <b>calls</b>
PAC's Groundrules	<b>yes</b> ; <b>formal</b> and informal	yes; <b>formal</b> and informal	yes; informal
PAC's <b>Decision-Making</b> Authority	<b>advisory</b> with <b>some</b> autonomy	<b>advisory</b>	<b>advisory</b>
PAC's Access to Process	advise <b>plan</b> devebpment, <b>Implementation</b> ; can Initiate projects which further RAP <b>goals</b>	advise plan devebpment, implementation; can recommend projects for Immediate <b>action</b>	<b>advise</b> plan <b>development</b>
Communication with <b>Constituencies</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>
Other Public involvement Activities	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>

### NOTES:

. Numbers are estimates and reflect representation on public advisory committee only (not sectors and caucuses, etc.)

\*Toronto Harbour Commissioners: **Metropolitan** Toronto and Regbn Conservation Authority

†Trent-Severn Waterway; Ministry of Natural **Resources**; MOE (Environmental Assessment Branch)

## **Chapter 4**

### **CASE STUDY FINDINGS**

Based on information collected from the surveys, document reviews, telephone interviews, and meetings with key resource people, a number of findings have been identified regarding the origins, structure, process, and context of each PAC. From these findings, some conclusions may be made about the use of PACs in the case studies. While three case studies alone cannot reflect the wide range of PACs in existence, they can provide useful insights into current practice. The surveys have been reviewed for insights into the case studies' structures and processes, while meetings, interviews, and document reviews have provided additional information on these two aspects as well as on the PACs' origins and contexts.

The response rates from the surveys are presented in Tables 5 and 6. Survey questions were, for the most part, open-ended. This format was chosen to promote "free thought" and elicit meaningful commentaries from respondents. Because fifteen participants per group responded to the survey, the responses have not been statistically analyzed. That is, all comments made by the respondents are treated as equally valid. No weights have been assigned to the responses because each is considered important in contributing some insight into how PACs are currently used and regarded and how their use may be improved in the future.

As previously mentioned, meetings and telephone interviews with key resource people provided information which supplemented the survey data. The open-ended interviews were based on, but by no means limited by, the non-italicized questions in Table 1.

The purpose of the following discussion is not to praise or criticize any particular PAC but to learn from the experiences of each for the benefit of PACs in future environmental planning processes. A brief discussion of the findings regarding the PACs' origins and structures precedes the major discussion of findings regarding the PACs' processes and contexts. Definitions of these elements are presented in Chapter 2. Dockstator (1990) includes a more detailed presentation of findings for all elements.

#### **PAC Origins and Structure**

As evidenced by the case studies, numerous processes may be followed to generate ideas for public involvement programs and support for the formation of PACs. The proponents in all case studies sought public support for their PACs. Ontario

**Table 5: RESPONSE RATE FOR RAP PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
SURVEY**

<b>SECTOR</b>	<b>NUMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES</b>	<b>NUMBER OF RESPONSES</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
Agriculture	2	0	0%
Business/Industry	2	1	50%
Comm. <del>Gps</del> /Individuals	6	6	100%
Environment	5	2	40%
Labour	1	0	0%
MTRCA	2	1	50%
Municipal	3	1	33%
Recreation/Tourism	4	2	50%
Toronto Harb. Comm.	1	0	0%
Facilitator	1	1	100%
Coordinator	1	1	100%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>54%</b>

**Table 6: RESPONSE RATE FOR SWEAP MSC SURVEY**

<b>CAUCUS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES</b>	<b>NUMBER OF RESPONSES</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>	<b>Extra Surveys from past reps</b>
Environmental Org	3	3	100%	1
General Public	3	3	100%	1
Government	3	1	33%	0
Politicians	3	0	0%	1
Waste <del>Mar</del> /Industry	3	3	100%	0
Facilitator	1	1	100%	N/A
Coordinator	1	1	100%	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>3</b>

Hydro staff, however, agreed that more public involvement in the initial scoping stages of the EA might have helped prevent or at least minimize the conflict. Issues and concerns of the cottagers could have been identified and addressed earlier in the process through appropriate studies.

Once the idea to establish a PAC was conceived, approvals and budgets were obtained with little or no difficulty. The public was integrally involved in determining the structure of all PACs and participation by all interested parties was sought. Where representation was lacking, other methods of obtaining public input were used. For example, in the RAP, some key environmental organizations refused to participate in the public advisory committee. The facilitator sought their input through other means, such as phone calls and written correspondence. Also, in the Ontario Hydro Big Chute GS project, area municipalities and year-round residents did not participate in the workshop process because they were not parties to the conflict. Their input was sought through other means, such as open houses and newsletters.

Most, if not all, PAC members were satisfied with the format of their respective PACs. For the RAP public advisory committee and SWEAP MSC, both groups of survey respondents liked the fact that several viewpoints could be represented, participants could voice their concerns, the structure fostered communication between disparate groups and experts, and the structure was simple and could be modified if needed.

On the other hand, RAP and SWEAP survey respondents noted that the structures of their PACs seemed to slow down progress in that issues may be raised at the large group meetings which then had to be taken to the sectors and caucuses for discussion. Closure on a particular issue could not be obtained at the next public advisory committee or MSC meeting if one sector or caucus had not discussed it.

Both Ontario Hydro staff and cottagers liked their workshop's flexibility in that the structure could be changed at any point during the day. Indeed, toward the end of the day, cottagers were able to "take over" the workshop and restructure it so that the remaining time could be used efficiently. Also, the cottagers appreciated the presence of the various resource people (i.e., government agency representatives and private consultant) at the workshop. However, both the cottagers and Ontario Hydro staff believed that the role played by the government agencies was too limited and they would have preferred the agency representatives to be more actively involved in identifying possible alternatives to resolving differences. The agency representatives' participation was limited for two reasons: 1) they understood that they were unable to express opinions on the likely environmental impacts of the project until they could



undertake a detailed review of the EA document; their comments would then be made available to the public; and 2) they understood that the process was designed to facilitate Ontario Hydro's consultation with the cottagers so they perceived that their input was peripheral to this (Barrett and Armour 1989).

Another area in which PAC members raised questions was their respective reporting structures. The reporting structure refers to the individual(s) or office(s) through which a recommendation or request moves to obtain the necessary review and consideration for incorporation into the end product. Figure 5 illustrates the reporting structures for each PAC. While the RAP coordinator was present at all PAC meetings to hear and respond to public input, participants still wondered how strongly their opinions influenced decisions regarding the RAP. Similarly, because of their "newness" to the EA process, the cottagers in the Big Chute GS workshop were unsure if the Ontario Hydro staff present were the "real" decision-makers and if their input would be taken seriously.

In SWEAP, an MSC recommendation had to be approved by the Metro Works Committee and Council before it could be implemented. If approved, the recommendation's implementation could be delayed depending on the inclination of the responsible office. For example, the Commissioner of Works delayed action on a number of MSC recommendations because of what MSC members perceived as his lack of support for their role in the SWEAP process. As already noted in Chapter 3, MSC took steps to streamline the reporting structure so that their recommendations and other submissions would carry more clout and be acted upon in a more timely manner.

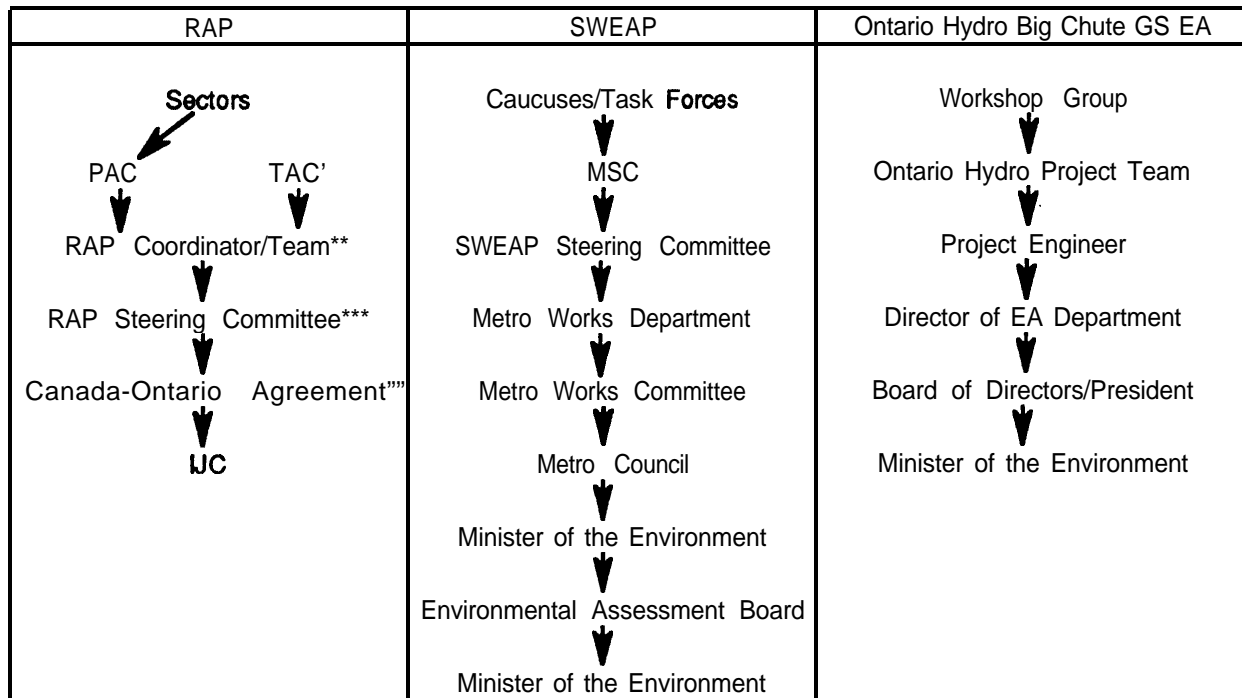
## **PAC Process**

Chapter 3 outlined how the PACs began working and the process they adopted to accomplish their objectives. This section reviews the findings from the **surveys**, interviews, and document reviews on six subject areas pertaining to the groups' processes: 1) Groundrules, 2) Objectives and Tasks, 3) Meetings, 4) Influence, 5) Facilitation, and 6) Organizational Structures and Planning Processes. In addition, principles supporting these findings are presented.

### **Groundrules**

Groundrules for PACs describe general requirements and procedures pertaining to attendance, participation of observers, the way decisions are made (e.g., voting with majority rule, consensus, etc.), the way meetings are run (e.g., by

Figure 5: REPORTING STRUCTURES OF THREE CASE STUDIES



**NOTES:**

- The TAC, technical advisory committee, is responsible for reviewing RAP documents from an implementation point of view.
- \*\* The RAP Team is a group of approximately thirteen representatives from the federal and provincial ministries, local and regional government agencies, and the public advisory committee.
- \*\* The RAP Steering Committee is composed of representatives from the **federal** and **provincial** Ministries of the Environment who are **involved** in the 17 Ontario **Areas** of Concern.
- \*\*\* The Canada-Ontario Agreement Team is **composed** of senior government officials from the federal and provincial Ministries of the Environment.
- Decisions of the RAP PAC **have** to meet with the approval of the RAP Coordinator.
- Decisions of the MSC have to **meet** with the approval of Metro Works Committee and **Metro** Council.
- Decisions of the Workshop Group are taken into consideration by **the** Ontario Hydro Project Team.
- The final plans **have** to proceed through all steps in **each** reporting structure (e.g., to the **IJC**, Minister of the Environment).

Sources: Martin, Blackwell, Gee, personal communication

parliamentary procedure, by a professionally facilitated format, etc.), frequency of communication with constituencies, and frequency of meetings, among other items.

Groundrules provide a type of blueprint of expectations which reflect how PAC members expect the group to operate. They may be incorporated into the PAC's terms of reference or written in a separate document. Their purpose is to establish and protect the rights and responsibilities of each individual member and of the group as a whole. If the PAC becomes lax on any of the groundrules, the integrity of the process may be jeopardized. For example, if the groundrules state that the decision-making process is consensual and the facilitator or chair inadvertently begins taking votes, the process is compromised in that one or more members may not be satisfied with the outcome. The implication of this occurrence, especially if it is repeated, is that a key stakeholder's (i.e., the representative's and his/her constituents') interests may not be addressed in the decisions being made and the stakeholder's willingness to commit to the final outcome may be placed at risk.

With this in mind, it is incumbent upon the PAC, including the facilitator, to ensure that the groundrules are faithfully being followed or that they are amended to satisfy any changes the group as a whole wishes to make. The group, including the facilitator, needs to be cognizant of the process so that if the PAC becomes lax on one or more groundrules, small problems may be resolved immediately and potentially larger ones down the road averted.

Each of the PACs in the case studies had a set of groundrules by which it operated. However, some groundrules were more informal than others. For the RAP public advisory committee, the groundrules were informal and unwritten, except for those in the terms of reference. The terms of reference, themselves, were quite general in nature. Indeed, because of the informality of the groundrules, survey respondents shared little, if any, agreement on which ones did and did not exist.

Likewise, the SWEAP MSC had a set of terms of reference which provided some detail on groundrules. While more MSC survey respondents than RAP public advisory committee respondents agreed about which groundrules existed for their group, neither group as a whole showed a complete understanding of their respective groundrules. It is unclear, therefore, if either PAC recognized the importance of groundrules in long-term public involvement processes such as theirs. On the other hand, as long as the facilitators worked to ensure that the groundrules were not compromised, the process and PAC members' rights were protected.

Because the Ontario Hydro PAC workshop was a one-day process, the groundrules were limited in nature. Those which were tacitly understood addressed

skills of members in small group discussions. These included such skills as listening, avoiding extreme positions, looking for creative solutions, clarifying to ensure mutual understanding, and seeking consensus, among others. The cottagers expressed the need for an additional groundrule to put the final consensus in writing so that they and Ontario Hydro clearly understood the commitments being made.

This discussion supports the following principles:

- . Groundrules should be established which define the rights and responsibilities of individual PAC members and of the group as a whole. PAC members, including the facilitator, should have a mutual understanding of these groundrules and should ensure the group's compliance with them so that the integrity of the process may be maintained.
- . Groundrules should include a description of the final output or expectation of the PAC. For example, if the group is seeking a written, binding agreement among parties, a rule should be established noting that all parties agree to work in good faith toward this end.
- . Groundrules and terms of reference should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they are up-to-date. If necessary, they should be amended to reflect any changes the group as a whole wishes to make.

### Objectives and Tasks

Each PAC in the case studies had a set of objectives. A clear understanding of a PAC's objectives is important for PAC members so that they know what their purpose is and can choose tasks which will work toward fulfilling this purpose.

In asking RAP and MSC survey respondents to note which tasks their PACs performed, no clear consensus was obtained, which seemed to indicate an incomplete understanding of their PACs' mandates. This appeared to be especially true with the RAP public advisory committee. One survey respondent perceived that the group had "no control over deciding its functions." At a public advisory committee meeting, some members expressed frustration with the "lack of direction" and characterized the committee's process as "flying by the seat of its pants."

Without a clear and mutual understanding among members of what the group should be doing and working toward, PACs run the risk of collapse from within. That is, feelings of uncertainty and futility may grow if members do not have or are not provided with the means to define a clear direction. The PAC may lose its momentum. Members may leave because they do not feel they are accomplishing anything. As a result, the PAC may dissolve.

With respect to the Ontario Hydro workshop, the participants in the evaluation felt that many of the tasks they had set out to accomplish were fulfilled. However, while the conflict appeared to be resolved with the consensus obtained and trust generated at the workshop, it resurfaced when the project team announced their intention to pursue the ten MW alternative. As suggested by the facilitators in their evaluation of the workshop process, Ontario Hydro staff should have given more thought to how the decision to pursue the ten MW alternative was announced and perhaps provided an opportunity for the cottagers to comment before the decision was finalized (Barrett and Armour 1989).

This discussion supports the following principles:

- . The objectives and tasks of a PAC should be identified and clarified at the start of the process so that all members have a clear understanding of what it is they will be doing.
- . PAC members should be involved in determining their objectives and tasks.
- . As the planning process progresses, the PAC should review their objectives and tasks periodically to determine their continued applicability. Where necessary, changes should be made to update the PAC's work with respect to progress made in the technical aspects of the planning process.

### Meetings

The SWEAP MSC and RAP public advisory committee met monthly with caucus and sector meetings in between. The majority of members considered this sufficient. However, a few members from both PACs, including the facilitators, note that because of the large number of issues and of the importance of dealing with them as quickly as possible, more meetings would have been desirable. Because of the long time between monthly meetings, they noted that members quickly got out-of-date on the issues. On the same token, these individuals recognize that a volunteer's time is limited and that the existing framework would have to suffice until better mechanisms of keeping informed and exchanging viewpoints between meetings are found.

The cottagers participating in the Ontario Hydro workshop met a number of times with the facilitators to help plan the day-long workshop and attended the evening seminars, the workshop, and follow-up meetings with Ontario Hydro. Given their limited time availability, the cottagers and Ontario Hydro noted that this was sufficient. However, one group of cottagers noted that additional meetings after the workshop would have been useful to negotiate a formal agreement with Ontario Hydro or at least write down the detailed points of the consensus.

Dockstator (1990) includes a detailed list of PAC members' comments regarding their respective meetings. The following principles are presented in support of the PAC members' comments and the study's findings:

- The design of PAC meetings and the process to be followed should be given careful thought so as to maximize the use of the volunteers' time.
- Sufficient time should be spent on providing the PAC members with background information so that they have an adequate understanding of the context of their work.
- Meetings should be properly facilitated to ensure that all members have an opportunity to speak and all concerns are heard, that the agenda is followed in a timely manner, that conflicts are managed effectively, that groundrules are followed, and that the tasks at hand are accomplished.
- Agendas and supporting materials should be streamlined to focus the meetings and maximize the use of PAC members' time.
- When presenting material to or discussing issues with PACs, technical experts and other members of a project team should refrain from using jargon and technical language with which PAC members may not be familiar.
- If necessary, training on group process and communication skills should be provided for PAC members.
- Decisions at meetings should be made by consensus. While vote-taking may be necessary as a tool to identify where points of disagreement remain, it should not be used for decision-making.

### Influence

Survey respondents from all PACs expressed mixed feelings about their influence on decisions. The RAP public advisory committee wished to influence several groups: the RAP team in the development of the RAP and those who will be responsible for implementing the RAP. This latter group included municipalities (governments and councils), individual citizens, the private sector, and the provincial and federal governments. While many survey respondents felt that the public advisory committee could influence their "target audiences," few were able to identify a specific example where they had been successful.

One area where the committee had had some influence was with the RAP goals. The goals had been distributed to area municipalities and while some municipalities had accepted them, others had not. Committee members had conducted little, if any, lobbying to get the other councils to endorse them. The goals

had also been given to the RAP team. The coordinator noted that the RAP team had approved them, if not publicly, then tacitly. The public advisory committee was assuming that the RAP team used the goals to guide its work.

Some survey respondents felt that their influence could be improved and suggested a number of strategies, some of which were to involve representatives from the urban development profession and more political representatives, to increase visibility in the media, and to go to governments and businesses directly and encourage them to adopt the RAP goals.

With respect to SWEAP, MSC survey respondents noted that the committee wished to influence the SWEAP Steering Committee, politicians on the Works Committee, the Works Department, and/or anyone dealing with waste in Metropolitan Toronto, including industries and the public. While some successes in influencing one or more of these “target audiences” were identified in the survey, such as the adoption of the MSC guiding principles, support for the Public Education Program, and implementation of the Waste Composition Study,<sup>5</sup> many MSC survey respondents noted that the process had been “all too slow” or that little action had been taken on their submissions because the Commissioner of Works had his “own agenda.”

The MSC survey respondents who felt that their influence could be improved suggested increased lobbying, improved media coverage, and greater control over staff and budget, among other changes.

One change the MSC did achieve was that the wording of its recommendations was no longer to be revised as submissions moved through the reporting structure. Instead, the SWEAP Steering Committee and Works Department attached their opinions to MSC's recommendations and the Works Committee received the opinions of all three groups intact. This was to ensure that MSC's opinions reached the Works Committee, and if consensus was not reached on a particular recommendation, that the divergence in viewpoints among the various interests of the MSC was not lost.

Finally, in the Ontario Hydro case study, the cottagers left the one-day workshop feeling that perhaps they had impressed upon the project team the importance of their concerns and would succeed in getting them addressed through implementation of the consensus. While both Ontario Hydro and the cottagers were satisfied with the workshop's outcome, the cottagers remained somewhat uneasy because time did not allow further discussions to make the consensus more specific. Indeed, some

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<sup>5</sup> However, both the Public Education Program and the Waste Composition Study were approved and implemented only after significant delays.

cottagers noted that because the consensus was not written into an agreement, they and Ontario Hydro were “now having a hard time figuring out what was said” (Mitchell, personal communication); opinions appear to differ on the exact details of the consensus.

To improve their influence, the cottagers suggested translating the original consensus into a written and binding agreement, involving the cottagers earlier in the EA process so that their concerns could have been identified and responded to sooner, and expanding the types of intervenors eligible for funding under the Ontario **Intervenor** Funding Act so that parties in Class EA projects (which may not proceed to hearings) would be able to obtain funding to hire consultants and/or legal expertise and to compensate them for the significant amounts of time and money spent on preparing for meetings, obtaining input and feedback from their associations’ members, and writing letters to Ontario Hydro, among other activities.

This discussion supports the following principles:

- Who the PAC wishes to influence should be clarified at the beginning of a PAC’s work. This should occur at the same time that goals and objectives for the PAC are defined and functions of the PAC identified.
- Strategies for influencing the “target audience(s)” and mechanisms for implementing them should be developed. Different strategies may be needed for each “target audience.”
- The reporting structure and information flow of the PAC should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they are operating effectively and as originally intended. Mechanisms should be established to amend the reporting structure and information flow, if needed.

### Facilitation

Facilitation for each PAC was different. The RAP public advisory committee facilitator managed the **logistics** of the PAC’s meetings. He distributed materials to PAC members before meetings, established the agenda, and provided assistance to the PAC and sectors as needed. He did not actually facilitate the meetings. A chairperson was designated to reside over meetings, while the facilitator took the minutes. During meetings, the facilitator sat beside the chairman and provided assistance or background information when needed. For the most part, however, the facilitator allowed the group to work through the agenda by itself with little guidance on the process of the meeting.



Ail RAP survey respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with how the facilitator is fulfilling his role. They saw his role as providing a link to all RAP groups, (i.e., RAP team, public advisory committee, MOE, etc.), serving as an advisor, managing the logistics of meetings, and providing support services to the PAC and sectors, among other tasks. Few respondents had suggestions of what the facilitator could do differently or what additional tasks he should do. One member suggested that the facilitator should be more experienced in actually facilitating meetings. Another suggested that he become more independent from MOE **and** divorce himself from the MOE attitude toward public involvement which was perceived to be negative. A third respondent suggested that the facilitator remain well-connected with those interest groups not represented on the PAC so that informal channels of communication with the community at large are maintained.

Unlike the RAP facilitator, the facilitator for MSC meetings actually facilitated the meetings, assisting the group in working through the agenda and making sure all members had an opportunity to speak. In addition to focussing discussions, working to reach consensus, and making sure that all viewpoints were heard, according to MSC survey respondents, the facilitator was responsible for synthesizing the information gathered at meetings, representing the MSC at SWEAP Steering Committee meetings, serving as the group's spokesperson once decisions were made, and serving as coordinator between the MSC, caucuses, Works Committee, and other SWEAP actors. Most respondents to the survey were satisfied or very satisfied with how the facilitator was fulfilling his role. Few respondents had suggestions of what he could do differently or what additional tasks he should perform. Two respondents suggested that the facilitator should lobby to ensure that MSC recommendations and submissions are **acted** upon in a timely manner.

In the Ontario Hydro workshop, the facilitators were responsible for designing the one-day workshop with representatives from the cottagers associations. Also, while not facilitating small group discussions, they facilitated the overall process and progress of the day by "floating" between discussion groups and providing assistance to workshop participants when needed. All participants of the workshop were satisfied or very satisfied with the facilitators, even though a few of the cottagers "... expressed doubts that they were independent and objective since Ontario Hydro hired them" (Barrett and Armour 1989: 12). However, no specific complaints of bias were voiced. A few suggestions about what the facilitators could have done differently include being **more** involved in the design and management of the rest of the program (e.g., the

evening seminars and follow-up meeting on March 9, 1989) and making their role more explicit.

This discussion supports the following principles:

- The facilitator should be a neutral third party and skilled in group dynamics, conflict resolution, group process, and facilitation of meetings.
- The facilitator should be considered a resource person of the PAC and should be used by the PAC as an expert in assisting the group not only in logistical matters, but also in matters concerning the process of the group during meetings and the progress of the group toward reaching its goals and objectives.
- The facilitator should be given sufficient independence from the proponent or sponsoring agency so that all PAC members can trust him/her to assist the group in its work as opposed to assisting the proponent or sponsoring agency in its work.

### PAC Context

The context of a PAC refers to the surrounding environment, that is, in what framework the PAC is operating. Two items are discussed to examine each PAC's context: 1) the organizational structures within which each PAC operates, and 2) the planning processes within which each PAC operates.

### Organizational Structures

All three PACs existed within traditional, bureaucratic, hierarchical frameworks. Several people expressed frustration in participating in a collaborative and consensual decision-making process within a bureaucracy with an autocratic form of decision-making. Barbara Wallace, the former Public Participation Coordinator for SWEAP, commented that the mindset often found in a bureaucracy makes it difficult to work in a consensual framework (Wallace, personal communication). That is, while hearing the public's ideas was seen as a necessary undertaking, the government was perceived as putting limits on how much they would hear. In Barbara Wallace's point of view, this "entrenched" attitude limited the usefulness of the MSC in the SWEAP process. She questioned the compatibility of consensual processes and bureaucracies. On the same token, she noted that after the first few years of MSC's existence, the government grew to recognize the MSC as a valid means for obtaining public input. The MSC was seen as a good reflection of public will and respect for it grew, albeit slowly (Wallace, personal communication).

John Jackson, the former MSC facilitator, concurred with Barbara Wallace's comments. He noted that it was a mistake for the MSC to report through the bureaucracy; it should report directly to the politicians on the Metro Works Committee. In Mr. Jackson's opinion, the Commissioner of Works did not give the MSC an adequate opportunity to be a part of the power structure. As a result, the MSC needed to strengthen its position through other means, such as increased lobbying of Metro Toronto politicians (Jackson, personal communication).

In the Big Chute generating station redevelopment project, cottagers expressed the same concern for the bureaucracy within Ontario Hydro. While they participated in the workshop because they had nothing to lose and hoped that they could build a consensus with the agency, the cottagers feared that, in the end, the hierarchy would prevail and decision-makers in Ontario Hydro would decide not to adopt the workshop's consensus. The cottagers were unsure of their role in the decision-making process, that is, how much influence they would actually have on the final decision regarding the megawatt alternative and mitigative measures. In the end, while they were satisfied with Ontario Hydro's proposals to mitigate some environmental impacts, the cottagers were dismayed with the agency's decision to proceed with the ten MW alternative and felt that impacts under the ten MW scenario could not be mitigated. The cottagers felt that their initial perception of the large bureaucratic corporation was upheld and wondered if the workshop had had any real effect at all on the decision.

The RAP process appeared to provide an opportunity to overcome some of these difficulties between consensual and autocratic decision-making frameworks. At least in the Metro Toronto RAP process, the RAP Coordinator (a government civil servant) encouraged the PAC to be meaningfully and proactively involved in the process to develop the RAP. The RAP Coordinator gave the PAC a great deal of leeway in deciding what role it would play in the planning process. The difficulty here, however, is that given the freedom to determine its direction, the PAC did not appear to have the expertise among its members or guidance from other sources to do so. Several members expressed genuine frustration at the lack of clarity in the PAC's purpose. One may argue that it should be the facilitator's role to assist the group through this difficulty. However, either the facilitator and the PAC did not see it as being his role or they did not know that it should be his role to do so.

The Metro Toronto RAP process and the apparently positive attitude of the RAP Coordinator toward the PAC indicate that, given the government will to do so, consensual decision-making processes can coexist with bureaucratic structures. However, in addition to support from key decision-makers, expert facilitation of the

PAC appears to be key to make the most of this opportunity. This discussion supports the following principle:

- Whatever the proponent agency's organizational structure (e.g., bureaucratic or other), managers in key decision-making positions for a particular undertaking should be supportive of a PAC's collaborative involvement in the planning process for that undertaking.

### Planning Processes

Aside from the implications of working within bureaucracies, the types of planning processes have certain implications of their own for collaborative decision-making. For the RAP, the planning process appears to be fairly supportive of collaborative planning. The IJC mandate to develop RAPs requires the cooperation of all stakeholders, including the public. Once the final Metro Toronto RAP document has been accepted by the IJC, however, the implementation of the plan may be another story. The various jurisdictions must embrace the plan and agree to implement the applicable programs and policies. The processes used to obtain their support for and to implement the plan may be many and complex.

For example, EA approval or approval under the Environmental Protection Act may be required for specific parts of the plan. In addition, the role of the PAC and even its existence in this stage is uncertain. Depending on the future of the PAC and the several jurisdictions' approval processes, the involvement of the PAC in such steps as seeking Council and agency approval in the numerous municipalities and jurisdictions, planning strategies to implement specific parts of the RAP, and others, has yet to be explored. This requires definition of the degree to which collaboration and joint decision-making will be a part of the implementation stage and the role, if any, the PAC will play in it.

For the SWEAP and Ontario Hydro projects, the planning processes are closely related, one being a full EA and the other a Class EA. As both fall under the same legislation, both are approval processes. While in SWEAP, the approval process appears to have affected MSC's activities little, if at all, it has served to limit the roles played by various government agencies in the Ontario Hydro project. As discussed earlier, the MOE, MNR, and TSW felt constrained by the EA process, and they limited their involvement to an observer/advisor capacity. They did not feel they could be a full partner in the discussions or a party to the consensus. As a member of the project team noted, the government agencies considered themselves "judgers, not arbiters" or "reviewers, not problem-solvers," and as such, they felt they could not be a part of a

collaborative or conflict resolution process with the public and proponent simultaneously (Gee, personal communication).

Perhaps this problem regarding the role of stakeholders is due, in part, to the relative “newness” of integrating conflict resolution methods (e.g., mediation) in the EA process. The integration is, as yet, incomplete in that details such as these have not been completely ironed out. If conflict resolution methods are to be used in EA processes and if the trend toward joint planning and decision-making is to continue, then adaptations need to be explored. Solutions need to be found which promote more collaborative involvement by all stakeholders, including those government agencies both affected by project proposals and serving in a “reviewer” capacity.

This discussion supports the following principles:

- The planning process should be adaptable so that all parties involved in a PAC, including conflict resolution workshops, are not constrained by the planning process and are able to participate as full partners in the collaborative decision-making process.

## Chapter 5 CONCLUSIONS

Given the findings from the surveys, document review, and interviews with key resource people presented in Chapter 4, a number of conclusions regarding the use of **PACs** as a method of involving the public in environmental planning processes may be drawn. In addition to the several principles outlined in the previous chapter and discussed further in Dockstator (1990), four key elements in creating, operating, and maintaining **PACs** are explored: 1) the role of the facilitator, 2) start-up, 3) the role of decision-makers, and 4) the role of stakeholders.

### **The Role of the Facilitator**

PAC members volunteer their time and energy to provide substantive input into an environmental planning process. While they have valuable contributions to make in terms of content (e.g., on Toronto waterfront issues, waste issues, or concerns about a project's impacts on lakes in cottage country), they most likely do not have the expertise to manage the **PAC's** process (e.g., facilitating group discussions, managing conflicts, etc.). This is the facilitator's job. The facilitator ~~is~~ there to **facilitate**, that is, to help the group provide meaningful input into the development of an environmental plan or decision. This involves both logistical (i.e., setting the agenda, providing information and materials to PAC members, etc.) and procedural skills (i.e., facilitating meetings, working through conflicts, ensuring constructive dialogue, etc.). The facilitator should have these skills and use them to assist the PAC in being as effective as possible. Likewise, PAC members should be aware of a facilitator's skills and ensure that the facilitator is being used to their advantage.

A simple example is the facilitation of meetings. This should be the facilitator's job, not a PAC member's responsibility. The time of all volunteer PAC members is valuable and should be spent on participating in substantive discussions rather than worrying about procedural items, such as how much time should be spent on the discussion and has everyone had an opportunity to speak? This should be the facilitator's responsibility so that the time spent during meetings by all PAC members can be maximized.

Also, the facilitator's skills should include the knowledge of using problem-solving tools, such as brainstorming and nominal group technique, so that if and when the PAC encounters difficulty in a discussion, the facilitator can use these special skills to assist the group in working through the problem. In addition, the facilitator should

be a neutral third party, independent of the agency sponsoring the PAC, so that trust may be developed between the group and the facilitator and the group can rely on the facilitator to act in its best interest.

While the facilitators for the Ontario Hydro workshop and the MSC appear to serve in this context, the RAP public advisory committee's facilitator is serving in a different capacity. As already mentioned, a committee member chairs the meetings. The facilitator records the minutes of the meetings. One can argue that because the group is allowed to determine its own direction, the group should direct the process and a committee member ~~should chair the meetings~~ existing framework. However, one can also argue that if the group does not have the skills or the expertise to facilitate itself, it will not be able to operate as effectively as possible and its ability to accomplish its objectives may be impeded. It is argued here that while the RAP public advisory committee has been given a great deal of freedom to determine its future, a facilitator should assist the group in maximizing its opportunity to do so. In the case of the RAP public advisory committee, where several members have repeatedly expressed frustration and have felt that the group is "floundering," "has no clear direction," and "does not know its mandate," the facilitator should take control of the process so that this problem may be addressed before it negatively affects the group's confidence and work.

The point of this discussion is that the facilitator should have the necessary skills to effectively manage the group's process. Similarly, the PAC members should recognize that the facilitator is a valuable resource and they should be aware of his/her special skills which will help them focus their direction and accomplish their objectives. As will be seen throughout this discussion, the responsibilities of the facilitator are numerous and are key to the PAC's feelings of accomplishment and to the members' working relationships.

### **Start-Up**

As can be seen from the findings presented in Chapters 3 and 4, PACs can "start-up" in a number of ways. In the case of the Ontario Hydro project, the PAC began as informal discussions between project team members and then between the project team and cottagers, orienting each to their respective concerns and developing the workshop idea. In SWEAP, the initial MSC meetings combined work on specific tasks and work on relationships between caucuses. In the RAP process, the public advisory committee initially focussed on the task of developing goals for the RAP.

When beginning a PAC, it is important for the facilitator to be aware of both the

group's interrelationships and the group's reason for existence. As noted by one facilitator, it is difficult to achieve a good balance between overcoming stereotypes and negative attitudes which may exist between interest groups on the one hand, and on the other hand, giving the PAC an early sense of accomplishment by working on substantive issues (Jackson, personal communication). Both are equally important. Without good rapport among group members, conflicts and tensions may grow to the point where it becomes impossible for the group to work constructively together. Likewise, if the group does not feel it is contributing to the planning process in a substantive manner, any initial momentum which may have existed may wane and the group may dissolve due to feelings of ineffectiveness. Hence, achieving a reasonable balance between these two aspects of working in groups is crucial during the early stages of a PAC's existence.

The facilitator plays a key role in assisting the group through this phase. Whether it is task-oriented or process-oriented or a combination of both, sufficient time must be devoted to developing a common ground from which all PAC members can move together. This entails orienting the group to two broad areas: the project and the PAC. In orienting the group to the project, PAC members need to be provided with sufficient information to understand what the planning process is and what the proposed undertaking is. The facilitator should work to ensure that all members are informed, for example, about the environmental assessment process or the RAP planning process so that everyone has a common understanding of the overall framework within which the plan is to be developed. In addition, the facilitator should work to ensure that PAC members have a common understanding of the proposed project, whether it is the development of a waste management master plan, remedial action plan, or redevelopment of a hydroelectric generating station. Background material (e.g., government publications, newspaper or magazine articles, and anything that will provide the PAC with background information) should be provided to PAC members in language they can understand. Speakers with well-prepared presentations (again, using language PAC members can understand) should be invited to introduce the PAC to the project and to answer questions. Without a common understanding of the project, each PAC member may start with different assumptions about the project, some of which may be false.

In introducing the group to working in a PAC, sufficient time should be devoted to clarifying everyone's understanding of the PAC's mandate. That is, what is the PAC's role? Can the PAC define its purpose? If so, what will it be? How will the PAC make its decisions (e.g., by taking votes or through consensus)? Does the PAC have



control over its budget? Who is the PAC trying to influence or work with in the decision-making process? Will the decision-makers be present at the meetings? These and other questions need to be answered by both PAC members and the proponent so that, again, everyone has a common understanding of the group's process and expectations.

Another aspect of the PAC's orientation to the process is understanding how to work effectively in a group setting. While this may sound elementary, it requires certain skills and awareness. For example, what is the role of the facilitator? What are the responsibilities of the PAC members? What are the basic skills of working in groups and of participating in group discussions?

Much of this information on process may be written in terms of reference or in some other form which the group may develop initially and modify as necessary. It is important to have something to refer back to when assessing the group's process and progress at various points during the PAC's existence. The facilitator and PAC members should review these groundrules periodically to ensure that everyone continues to agree with them and abide by them. If they are not followed, problems may arise, such as confusion over the group's mandate, alienation of members by not ensuring consensus, or unequal opportunities for the various viewpoints to be heard and concerns addressed. It is both the members' and the facilitator's responsibility to enforce the groundrules. In addition, it is the members' right to change the process if they are dissatisfied with how the group is working. Initially, however, it is the facilitator's responsibility to ensure that basic information on the project and on the PAC is understood so that everyone begins from a common ground.

### The Role of Decision-Makers

Given the case studies reviewed in this paper, establishing a collaborative decision-making process and actually making it work within a traditionally hierarchical framework, such as a bureaucracy, is challenging. While the idea to involve the publics in this manner may be initially supported by upper management, the implications of this decision may not be fully realized. That is, those traditionally responsible for making decisions in a bureaucracy may not realize that forming a PAC may mean sharing some decision-making powers with it.

The SWEAP MSC appears to have run into difficulties because of this very problem. The Commissioner of Works, the one responsible for acting on MSC recommendations and submissions, does not appear to be a full partner in the MSC process. While he supported the decision to form the MSC, his commitment to the

publics' involvement in this manner is in question. He has not acted upon MSC submissions and recommendations as quickly as the MSC would have liked and he has not communicated with the group regularly to explain his actions or inactions. This has created ill-feelings among MSC members. Some members feel that the Commissioner of Works regards them as "a thorn in his side." They wonder if he is trying to sabotage the MSC and its efforts to contribute constructively to solving Metro Toronto's waste crisis. While this is the **MSC's** perception and, in fact, the Commissioner may be in full support of **MSC's** involvement in SWEAP, his actions (or inactions) tend to speak louder than his words which have been few. Matters could improve if he proved his support for the MSC by changing his approach. This would entail shelving the entrenched attitudes and habits of a bureaucrat and making a "good faith" effort to work cooperatively with the group. This requires communicating with the MSC regularly (if not regularly attending MSC meetings), being responsive and accessible, acting on MSC recommendations and submissions in a timely manner, and clearly attempting to address MSC concerns, among other measures.

The RAP public advisory committee is a PAC where collaborative decision-making within a bureaucracy may be working. The public advisory committee has been given a great deal of freedom in determining its direction. In addition, the RAP Coordinator is open to working with the committee in a meaningful manner and to incorporating their concerns into the RAP as much as possible. Here, key managerial support appears to exist. While the committee has yet to fully test the system, the conditions appear ripe for planning collaboratively.

The Ontario Hydro workshop raises another point about the role of decision-makers. Initially, decision-makers and the bureaucratic structure of Ontario Hydro as a whole were viewed with skepticism. The cottagers were wary of the "large corporation" and wondered if they could really influence Ontario Hydro's decision. They felt that the decision-makers did not have to abide by any consensus which may be reached during the workshop and that the traditional, hierarchical decision-making process within the agency would prevail. The project team worked hard to overcome this preconception and, to some degree, succeeded through the workshop process. A degree of trust was developed because of the "good faith" nature in which Ontario Hydro had participated and the cooperative atmosphere which was generated during the day. However, when the decision to pursue the ten MW alternative was announced several months after the workshop, the cottagers' trust in Ontario Hydro dwindled and their initial skepticism of the agency was confirmed.

It seems that the simplest actions of the decision-maker can make or break a situation. As such, it is crucial that decision-makers working in a collaborative process from within a bureaucracy take extra care in the steps they take with a PAC. Central to the PAC process being a positive experience for decision-makers and PAC members alike is the development of mutual respect and trust. This requires dealing with each other openly, sincerely, and in good faith and communicating with each other effectively. Perhaps it is a greater challenge for the decision-makers than for PAC members to do so because of the PAC members' possible preconceptions and stereotypes of bureaucrats and bureaucracies.<sup>6</sup> If this is true, the role the **decision-makers** play, the words they say, and the actions they take are key to making the PAC process a mutually beneficial one.

### **The Role of Stakeholders**

In the traditional EA process, the role of government agencies (other than the proponent) has been limited to consulting with the proponent on issues within their jurisdiction and to reviewing the draft EA once it has been made public. Little involvement, if any, occurs directly with the public during the pre-submission consultation stage (PSC). As has been seen in the Ontario Hydro Big Chute generating station redevelopment project, this traditional role has served to limit the involvement of relevant government agencies in the workshop process. The representatives of the MOE, TSW, and MNR either refused to attend or attended but participated only as an observer or advisor, not as a full partner in the discussions.

Both Ontario Hydro and the cottagers expressed the desire for these stakeholders to have participated more fully. However, the government agencies' limited role in the workshop is understandable given their traditional responsibilities in the EA review process. They may not wish to commit to anything that they may have to reverse when the draft EA reaches their agency in the formal review period. Also, those representing the agencies may not be in a position to make any commitments; that is, they may not be the decision-makers for their office.

Collaborative decision-making processes, such as PACs and conflict resolution workshops, would certainly benefit if the government agencies which have a stake in the outcome could play a more involved role in them. A number of suggestions may

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<sup>6</sup> On the same token, the decision-makers may have preconceptions of PACs which may be counterproductive to a good working relationship. If this is true, PAC members need to take extra care in acting professionally when working with the decision-makers so that they may overcome these preconceptions.

contribute to overcoming present difficulties. For example, in the case of the Ontario Hydro workshop, the one-day process may be lengthened so that the government representatives can consult with their senior managers and return with further directions regarding the issues in question. Also, tentative agreements may be made subject to their senior managers' approval. A third option may be to ensure that the government representative has sufficient authority and knowledge of the project before hand so that he/she can contribute to the workshop in a meaningful manner. Fourth, the senior manager may serve as the government representative, providing that he/she has sufficient knowledge of the project's details. These are just a few suggestions to enhance the role of key government agencies in the pre-submission consultation phase of an EA process.

In longer PAC processes, such as SWEAP and RAP, another issue regarding the various interests' roles arises. Here, PAC members have been given varying degrees of freedom in determining what they will do and how they will do it. In the RAP, the public advisory committee can limit its role to simply reviewing drafts of the RAP and to ensuring that public concerns are addressed. They can expand this role by initiating projects in the community which further RAP goals. The MSC can do the same for SWEAP. The keys here, as mentioned earlier, are 1) for all PAC members to have a clear understanding of what their role is and can be, and 2) for the facilitator to assist the PAC in defining its role (i.e., activities) and in evaluating its progress toward fulfilling its mandate (i.e., completing activities which further their RAP or SWEAP goals).

## **Conclusion**

The three case studies presented in this paper have provided an opportunity to examine current practice regarding how PACs are being used in environmental planning processes. While difficulties exist in how they are organized, structured, and operating, PACs show promise as a useful means of involving the public collaboratively in environmental decision-making. The principles and conclusions in this paper are intended to highlight how these difficulties may be overcome and how the strengths may be reinforced. Some may require additional research so that feasible alternatives may be developed. Also, more case studies need to be examined to confirm the findings and expand the base of knowledge in this field. Still, it is hoped that this paper provides some insight toward improving the use of PACs in environmental planning and collaborative decision-making processes.

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