

Evaluation At a Glance



Horizontal Evaluation of the Federal Leadership Towards Zero Plastic Waste in Canada Initiative

About the program

The Federal Leadership Towards Zero Plastic Waste in Canada initiative (“the Initiative”) aims to eliminate or reduce plastic waste, including by increasing waste diversion and the recovery of plastic waste, while also reducing marine pollution and GHG emissions, and stimulating clean growth.

Through the Initiative, federal partners deliver a range of programs and activities intended to address plastic waste issues and fulfill federal commitments under the Ocean Plastics Charter, and the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment’s (CCME) Canada-Wide Strategy on Zero Plastic Waste and associated Phase 1 and 2 Action Plans. Core federal departments include Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), which leads the Initiative, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), Transport Canada (TC), Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC).

The Initiative is organized into 6 themes. Activities within these themes are being implemented using a whole-of-government approach over 3 years. The 6 themes began concerted action to achieve by 2030 the ultimate shared outcome of keeping plastics in the economy, out of the environment and are designed to address the lifecycle of plastics or to instigate change. Themes 1, 2, and 5 cover the core lifecycle elements of plastics (production, use, end-of-life), while the remaining themes support future action by establishing the evidence base and necessary partnerships.

What the evaluation found

The evaluation found that there is a societal and environmental need to address plastic waste and a clear requirement for federal leadership. However, a multi-stakeholder approach will be required to achieve a circular, zero plastic economy.

Overall, implementation of the Initiative has gone well, and most planned activities are either completed or on track for completion.

The overall design of the Initiative is appropriate. The Initiative’s main activity areas are aligned with federal government priorities and responsibilities, and there is no evidence of overlap and duplication with the activities of other jurisdictions. Further, the Initiative’s approach is



comprehensive and activities are designed to address the issue from various angles and at various points along the plastics value chain. The Initiative was designed to build the foundation for future work, particularly in light of the emerging science on the impact of plastic waste and pollution on the environment and the lack of science on the impact of plastic waste and pollution on human health.

With regards to progress made toward the Initiative's short-term outcomes, there is sufficient evidence that scientific information on plastics is being generated, as well as some evidence that it has been used to inform policy. There is a need for additional information on plastics in the following areas: 1) socio-economic information on plastics throughout their lifecycle, including information on the costs of transitioning to an increasingly circular economy; 2) enhanced research efforts to quantify the contribution of the different pathways for marine plastic litter; and 3) increased data and information on the relationship between plastics, natural resource extraction, fossil fuels, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the current climate crisis.

While there is some evidence of progress toward the Initiative's second short-term outcome, namely that plastics have been diverted from landfills and the environment, the total amount of waste diverted or its relative impact on the total amount of plastic waste to date is not available due to data limitations. For example, while project-level data on the amount of plastic waste diversion is available, an accurate and comprehensive accounting of the total amount of diverted plastic waste as a result of Initiative activities is not available or, in the case of such things as lost gear, is impossible to accurately estimate. Moreover, given data gaps in the current understanding of plastic waste, it is challenging to draw conclusions about the relative impact of the Initiative on plastic waste in Canada as a whole. The publication by Statistics Canada in March 2022, which provides a national flow account for plastic materials, is a first step in measuring this impact.

Recommendations and management response

The following recommendations are directed to ECCC's Assistant Deputy Minister of the Environmental Protection Branch, as the senior departmental official responsible for the Initiative, in collaboration with applicable federal partners.

Recommendation 1: Consideration should be given to including more federal departments and agencies to support Initiative implementation. More formal recognition of and funding for, additional federal partners could improve the coherence and integration of plastic waste reduction measures being undertaken across federal government departments and agencies.

Management response: This evaluation covered the initial funding provided by the Government of Canada to work towards zero plastic waste. 4 departments received funding to

conduct work under this first initiative. Between 2019 and 2022, ECCC's outreach to additional departments led to greater participation in interdepartmental committees on zero plastic waste at the Director, Director General, or ADM levels. Participation rose to 18 departments, thereby significantly increasing linkages among federal programs and activities. At the conclusion of the first initiative, Budget 2022 provided funding to 7 departments to continue efforts to advance a circular plastics economy for Canada. To support the effective use of this funding, the interdepartmental committees established under the first initiative will continue to meet, and will also encourage engagement by other federal organizations throughout the next phase of the zero plastic waste initiative.

The forthcoming program funding documents will outline how the next phase of the initiative will be implemented by the 7 federal agencies.

Recommendation 2: Assess whether an additional allocation of resources and/or emphasis on prevention, minimization and reuse activities should be made. This is important given the prevalence of plastics in the lives of Canadians and in the Canadian economy and given the current lack of infrastructure for plastic waste recycling.

Management response: More work is needed to prevent and minimize plastic waste and pollution, and to increase the reuse of plastics. The focus of the work under the ongoing Zero Plastic Waste Initiative will continue to be based on the hierarchy that is reflected in the universally accepted waste management hierarchy and the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment's Canada-wide Strategy on Zero Plastic Waste. In the coming phase, ECCC will develop a roadmap to encourage product life extension, focusing on reuse and repair. This roadmap will be informed by a June 2021 study commissioned by ECCC on value-retention processes (VRPs): *A Socio-Economic and Environmental Study of the Canadian Remanufacturing Sector and Other Value-Retention Processes in the Context of a Circular Economy*, and a study on the reuse sector. It will complement a federal commitment to implement a "right to repair" to extend the life of home appliances, particularly electronics, through cooperation between ISED and ECCC.

Recommendation 3: Additional project funding (beyond conceptualisation and piloting phases) should be provided to support bringing successful and innovative practices to scale.

Management response: In the first 3 years of the Initiative, federal support advanced the waste reduction efforts of several high plastic waste-generating sectors. Following the Budget 2022 decision to renew the initiative, ECCC will continue to work with the textiles, automotive, packaging and healthcare sectors to reduce their plastic waste to prevent pollution. ECCC is also preparing recycled content regulations. Once these regulations are in place, ECCC will work with Public Works and Government Services and the Treasury Board Secretariat to include recycled content requirements in federal procurement. The overall goal of these

measures will be to accelerate the adoption of novel approaches and technologies for decreasing the amount of plastic waste that is generated in Canada.

Recommendation 4: Update the current logic model with a view to articulating a clear theory of change and streamlining the complexity of the model and the approach to performance measurement.

Management response: A new logic model will be developed for the second phase of the zero plastic waste initiative, which builds on the initial 3 years of foundational work. This logic model will be included in the Horizontal Management Framework for the upcoming program funding documents, based on the outcome of the Budget proposal and approval of program authorities. While the logic model and horizontal management framework will be expanded to include the numerous activities being developed across 7 federal organizations, the logic model will be simplified from the current version to include a clear theory of change that will facilitate measuring and reporting on outcomes.

About the evaluation

This evaluation focused on the period from June 2019 to September 2021. The objectives of the evaluation were to examine issues of relevance, efficiency and implementation and effectiveness as per the 2016 Treasury Board [Policy on Results](#), and to identify recommendations for possible improvements. It used multiple data collection methodologies including document, data, and literature review; 5 detailed case studies; and 71 key informant interviews with ECCC representatives, federal partners and external key informants, including researchers/academics, funding recipients, industry representatives, and representatives from environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS).