

# At a Glance



## Audit of the administration of the Public Inquiries Centre at ECCC

Responding to inquiries received from the public with the right information and in a timely manner is an important element of the Department's communications with Canadians. The Treasury Board Secretariat [Policy on Communications and Federal Identity](#) identifies that deputy heads are responsible for enabling communications with the public about policies, programs, services and initiatives by ensuring that their department responds to information requests or inquiries from the public promptly and without undue recourse to the [Access to Information Act](#).

At Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Public Affairs and Communications Branch, as designated by the Deputy Minister, is responsible for informing the public about policies, programs, services and initiatives. The Public Affairs and Communications Branch is a key enabling partner that provides professional support services across ECCC by offering expertise in Parliamentary and Cabinet Affairs, communications, and ministerial services, in addition to public inquiries.

The Public Inquiries Centre within the Public Affairs and Communications Branch acts as a point of entry to the Department for the nearly 8,000 inquiries received each year from the public via various communication channels including email, phone and mail. Accurately responding to these inquiries in a timely manner requires the Public Inquiries Centre to work with a network of subject-matter experts across the Department.

## What the audit found

---

ECCC has established some processes and practices to support the administration of public inquiries that are received from various entry points into the Department. There are a number of opportunities to improve the administration of public inquiries. These include:

- reviewing and assessing the role of the Public Inquiries Centre in the broader context of departmental administration of public inquiry activities
- having stronger controls and processes in place to support a full understanding of the number of inquiries received
- having the processes and tools in place to respond in a complete and accurate manner

Furthermore, there are opportunities to establish and implement standards for expected response times and whether these are being met.



## Recommendations and management response

---

### Recommendation 1

The Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Affairs and Communications Branch, should undertake an analysis of the current state of how public inquiries are received and responded to within the Department.

### Management response

The Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Affairs and Communications Branch, agrees with the recommendation. During the course of the audit, the Public Inquiries Centre team had begun to take steps to communicate and research how public inquiries through the ECCC Public Inquiries Centre are received by departmental experts once tasked by the team. Roles, responsibilities and service expectations to sector clients are being clarified and service expectations are being communicated to sector clients. Further, the Public Affairs and Communications Branch has collected information and data on how public inquiries are responded to by various teams within ECCC. PACB will complete the review of Public Inquiries Centre received inquiries and fully document the results to determine next steps.

### Recommendation 2

Based on this analysis, the Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Affairs and Communications Branch should develop for the Public Inquiries Centre:

- a service delivery model that supports consistent, complete and timely public inquiries administration
- an approach that includes the use of a common tool for client management and business intelligence purposes

### Management response

The Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Affairs and Communications Branch, agrees with the recommendation. A new outside resource will work with the Public Inquiries Centre team to develop and activate a service delivery model that supports consistent, complete and timely public inquiries administration. An operational plan for a 6-month pilot project with Services Canada will be developed to outline the actions to be taken including deliverables and specific deadlines.

The team will also strengthen its approach that includes the use of a common tool for client management and business intelligence purposes. Formal Public Inquiries Centre processes and protocols will also be developed to support Services Canada and Communications directorate collaboration planning over the short, medium and long term. The data and lessons learned during the pilot project with Service Canada will enable the team to establish a more

formal framework and protocol for inquiries as part of the development of the Communications directorate long-term plan beginning in September 2023.

## About the audit

---

The audit work was conducted between June 2022 and January 2023. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the administration of public inquiries by the Public Inquiries Centre at ECCC. The audit team assessed the extent to which ECCC had established processes and practices to ensure that public inquiries are addressed in a complete, accurate and timely manner, and that lessons learned from public inquiries inform broader ECCC communication efforts. The scope of the audit included a review of the governance, risk management and internal control processes in place to support and measure the delivery of public inquiry services.