

METRIC

Metric Commission Canada

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TO KEEP MOVING:

Forum calls on government for promotion and support

Canada's government was urged to show strong leadership and to take action in three areas to push forward the metric conversion process in recommendations made by participants in the Metric Forum held in Ottawa.

As well as taking legislative steps, the government was told that it should promote greater use of SI in its own operations, and undertake a publicity campaign to promote conversion and create a continuing impression of progress and inevitability.

The Forum recommended that more promotion was needed for small business, consumers and senior citizens, and that advisory teams to assist them should be established.

Industry representatives should be urged to speak out strongly on behalf of metric, and that large companies should use their publications as a means of informing employees and customers of the benefits derived in international trade from their adoption of SI.


Standardization of packaging formats should be encouraged in order to facilitate price comparisons for the consumer.

The government was also urged to provide leadership in the use of SI in its publications and official statements, on passports, in customs

Minister says message was: 'get on with it'

The Hon. Judy Erola, Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, told reporters following the Metric Forum that the message she received from the 200 participants was clear: that Canadians wanted to get on with the job of completing metric conversion.


This underlying theme ran through most presentations, covering a broad spectrum of industry and consumer sectors.

Metric-Métrieque is thus devoting this issue to a more detailed report of the comments registered by the major participants in the Forum. 

regulations, and in its departmental policies.

On the legislative side, besides recommendations aimed at reinstating enforcement of metric regulations, the Forum told government that legislation should be introduced in Canada as it is in the EEC, requiring that imported goods brought into Canada be in SI units only.

The government was also told that it should resolve the metric legal dispute regarding the sale of gasoline by asking for reference to the Supreme Court. It also suggested that the word "metric" be replaced in legislation by "SI" to indicate to the world that Canada is adapting the modern metric system, the International System of Units.

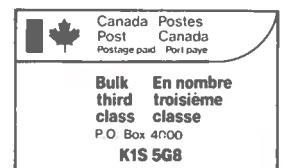
The Forum said the practice of mandatory advertising in metric should be reinstated, and that imperial be allowed until the end of 1985 as long as it is not predominant. Emphasis should be placed on metric weights and prices, and enforcement of metric-only regulations for the sale of food should be ensured. 

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Costs must be justified — Bill Domm

"I support metric, but only when it can be cost justified and only when it is desired by the sector affected," Conservative Member of Parliament Bill Domm told the 200 participants at the Metric Forum in Ottawa in April.

Domm, MP for Peterborough, Ont., has been the opposition party's chief critic of the government's metric conversion policy.

"We in opposition are opposed to mandatory metric," Domm said.

"We're not debating which is better or worse. We're not debating that there is a move to metric in the United States under a voluntary process. We're not debating that there

is a move to metric in the UK under a voluntary process. What we are debating in Canada today is how do you bring about a move to metric. . ."

Domm was speaking at the Forum during the international panel discussion which also heard representatives from the UK, Australia, the US and the European Economic Community.

Summing up his stance, Domm said: "Until the United States moves — our major trading partner — and the UK moves we can't afford to go it alone and we have to keep their pace of change in mind in order to cost justify the move here in Canada." ↗

Retail Council wants metric only

Warning against a "high level of confusion and chaos" if the government doesn't act swiftly, the vice-president of the Retail Council of Canada told participants in the Metric Forum that "We should be metric only."

Tim Carter said the ideas advanced by the Consumers' Association of Canada were backed by the Retail Council, and that metric conversion in Canada was "coming apart as we sit here."

He said there were many pockets across the country where "stores are sliding back" because of the government moratorium on enforcement of metric regulations, and the consumer "won't be able to compare inter-store, intra-store prices" and we will have a "very confusing marketplace."

Carter said that to abandon metric enforcement "means the end of easy comparison shopping and the beginning of chaos."

"We've always had to have rules. It's nothing new and I think in this case we should do it and we should move quickly because the situation is changing." ↗

'We've accomplished a lot' — packagers

"We've accomplished a lot. There are thousands of pre-packaged consumer goods on the market totally metric", Alan Brownridge told the Metric Forum on behalf of the packaging industry.

The job for the future is "to simplify some of the numbers", he said. Brownridge, who is manager of professional and regulatory services with Procter and Gamble, said the only products "still kicking around in odd sizes" are those which remain uneconomical to change. It will be done, he said, "when we find a way to put our timing into a perspective where we can do it economically."

As examples, he pointed to situations where "moulds wear out", or new art is required, or new products are being introduced.

Brownridge is chairman of the Working Group on Packaging. ↗

IN AUSTRALIA

'Even the babies are metric'

Things have gone so far in Australia that all the new babies are metric — "And we didn't have to do any fundamental operations on the women", Kevin Wilks told the Metric Forum.

"You can't have a baby in pounds and ounces anymore."

Wilks, who is director of the metric section of Australia's National Standards Commission, said that virtually all that's left to do in Australia is "tie the knot" on the metric file.

Australia is now formally and officially a metric country he said, noting that its metric board shut down operations in 1981 and his office will close next year.

Wilks said that while the switch to metric measure was usually regard-

ed primarily as a technical change, there was no doubt that a certain element of culture shock was inevitable for some people.

"We set out to convert the environment in which people will live and work and play. We don't expect people to suddenly expurgate their minds of all imperial references and replace them with metric. People learn metric by addition, not by substitution. People will reach a majority stage where their language is fundamentally metric.

"Nobody got hurt by us going metric," he said.

There were, he admitted, times of soul searching in Australia about going metric. However, he added, in answer to the question of whether they might have been on the wrong track, the answer was "No, never." ↗



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Too many funny numbers — Globe Columnist

"Manufacturers haven't done their bit in converting packages rationally", the consumer columnist of the Toronto Globe and Mail told the Metric Forum in Ottawa.

Ellen Roseman said: "We see too many of these funny numbers in the supermarket."


Roseman said she has been an advocate of metric conversion since 1975, since she believed that metrication of packaging would lead to rational sizing, "round numbers" that would make comparison shopping easy for consumers.

"Nine years later it hasn't happened," she said.

Ms. Roseman called on the government to "go further" and regulate

package sizes because "It's not happening voluntarily and it puts the shopper at a disadvantage."


She cited the case of a chocolate bar manufacturer who had recently introduced a large-sized chocolate bar which the wrapper indicated weighed 65.5 g. "Is (the manufacturer) hoping I'll read 655 g?"

"I don't think freedom of measuring really works," Roseman added. "There has to be a standard system of measurement in the country. . . when we finally do have a single measuring system we should also have some standardization of package sizing so consumers really have the freedom to shop and get the best value for their money." 

Swing to metric was well timed for Chrysler

The swing to metric in the automobile industry "coincided beautifully" with the need to effect changes in vehicle concepts, says Stan McDowall of Chrysler Canada Ltd.

McDowall, who is manager of product and quality engineering for Chrysler, told the recent Metric Forum in Ottawa that many costs of conversion were eliminated because the industry had to redesign for present-day concepts, and chose to simply redesign in metric.

The need to reduce vehicle mass and design smaller powerplants because of the energy crisis, plus the transition to front-wheel drive units provided Chrysler with an ideal opportunity, he said. Most Chrysler vehicles now are metric. 


In Britain, a lengthy process

As far back as 1951, a British government committee concluded that a change to the metric system was inevitable.

Now that it's 1984, the vast majority of Britons have come to agree with them, said Frieda Harris of Britain's National Weights and Measures Laboratory, speaking to the Metric Forum in Ottawa.

The main problems in going metric in Britain, she said, have occurred where traders or members of the public felt it was a violation of their rights to seek to enforce changes. They, she said, seem to be in the minority today.

British schools have taught primarily metric since 1974; most packaged goods are "made up" in metric; petrol retailing by most of the major oil companies has gone progressively metric; and most government purchasing specifications are in metric.

On the industrial side however, because of the association with the European Economic Community, the transition is much further along. The first initiatives were undertaken by British industry in 1965, when the Confederation of British Industry informed the government that it was in favor of adopting the metric system. 


'Sorry to hold everybody up' — ANMC chairman

"We're sorry to be holding everybody up", American National Metric Council chairman George Meixel told the international panel at the Metric Forum in Ottawa.

The metric conversion effort in the US had levelled off, "But it's going to take off again, and we're pretty enthused", Meixel said.

Meixel said ANMC was receiving strong support from the US Department of Commerce and the Department of Defense in its efforts to advance the cause of metric conversion in the US.


The ANMC chairman said international trade considerations would act as a "forcing function" in bringing the US to terms with metric commitment.

A problem for ANMC, Meixel said, was that it had to overcome a public perception in the US that little was happening in the metric conversion process. He expected that the developments he foresaw would help to overcome that perception. 

A 'non-issue' says EEC head

Metric conversion is a "non-issue" for the European Economic Community, says Dietrich Hammer, head of the EEC Commission in Ottawa.

Speaking to the Metric Forum hosted by Consumer and Corporate Affairs Minister Judy Erola, Hammer said that harmonizing the laws relating to measurement systems within the EEC is the only area of metric measure to which the community must address itself.

Britain and Ireland, the only member states which have not had the metric system in effect for the past 100 years, have been given a transition period during which they must complete adoption of the metric system. The exact date of completion will be fixed by the Council of Ministers of the Community by the end of 1989. 

JULY 1 TARGET

Construction sets itself a deadline

The Canadian Construction Association has designated July 1 as a target date after which all construction projects will be designed and carried out in metric dimensions with materials in hard metric sizes.


Robert Schuett, chairman of the board of the CCA, told the Metric Forum in Ottawa that the organization had decided a specific completion date was necessary to overcome what he called the "chicken-and-egg" syndrome related to production, supply and demand of hard-metric sized materials.

Schuett was referring to a situation that has existed in the Canadian construction industry for some time, whereby suppliers would not stock hard-metric sized materials, claiming the demand did not justify it. Contractors thus claimed that hard-metric sized materials were unavailable.

CCA has established a network of regional and provincial committees to spread the message of the target date, and pinpoint problem areas, Schuett said.

Recalling that the construction association, with endorsement from the Royal Architectural Institute, the Association of Consulting Engineers, and the Canadian Homebuilders Association had asked for legislation to make metric the sole system for industry back in 1969, Schuett said: "As a nation we simply cannot afford to operate in an environment of dual measurement any longer.

"At a time where we are often criticized for our poor record vis-à-vis productivity, our inability to conclude conversion only serves to support that criticism. Industry and government both have a responsibility to fulfill and it is time we lived up to that responsibility.

"There is no question," he said, "that the metric system is far more time efficient than the imperial system." 

CONSUMERS ASSOCIATION:

'A time for strong leadership'

Gina Hartley, chairman of the Metric Committee for the Consumers' Association of Canada, says that CAC has always urged total conversion in the shortest possible time, with rationally related hard metric sizes in the marketplace.

That stance, repeated during the Metric Forum, was the basis for three recommendations that were adopted as resolutions by the Forum.

Outlined previously in the May issue of Metric, the recommendations were that:

The government proceed directly to the Supreme Court of Canada on the dispute that led to the moratorium after a decision in the Ontario courts;

Dual advertising be extended to the end of 1985;

The emphasis on metric weights and prices at the retail level be restored.

Mrs Hartley pointed out that CAC started from the premise that the conversion process offered advantages to consumers: the system would be easier and simpler, and rational sizing would follow.


She said there has been backsliding — retailers advertising only in imperial, manufacturers putting out new products in sizes that do not fit the preferred round metric sizes to which they had previously agreed.

The CAC felt that manufacturers were waffling.

"We can understand the problems of throwing out millions of dollars of equipment when it isn't ready to be thrown out. But if industry would give us commitment to change when that change is reasonable. . ."

Mrs Hartley said that that commitment had not been forthcoming.

Consequently, she said, the consumer was still faced with difficulties in comparison pricing.

She said the costs of delays and backsliding would eventually be borne by the consumer, and said it was a time for "strong, clearly seen leadership, to get us through this period." 

Dual inventory should end — Alcan VP

The full benefits of metric conversion will only be reaped when dual inventories and pricing are no longer required, says Eric Trigg, senior vice-president of Alcan Aluminum Ltd.

Trigg, addressing 200 participants at the Metric Forum in Ottawa, thus urged "those industries and businesses which have not completed their conversion process to do so as expeditiously as possible."

Until conversion is complete, he said, "we are prolonging the pain and adding to the cost."

Alcan converted to metric in Canada in 1979, he said, and "see demonstrable efficiencies when it

becomes possible to deal in only one language of measurement.

"We are not the only multinational company seeing the necessity of dealing with the market on a global basis," he told the Forum. "Major North American automotive and farm equipment companies have adopted the metric system as their worldwide measurement language."

Consequently, he said, even in the US it was necessary to provide metric price sheets to cater to "the growing group of customers who have already switched to metric."

"Metrication will clearly help to simplify transactions in international trade," Trigg concluded. 