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Deputy Minister

Sous-ministre



JUN 14 2013

Mr. Neil Maxwell
Interim Commissioner of the Environment
and Sustainable Development
Office of the Auditor General of Canada
240 Sparks Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0G6

Dear Mr. ^{Neil}Maxwell:

I am writing in response to your comments on the draft 2013-16 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (FSDS). Environment Canada welcomes your comments as they represent a valuable and constructive contribution to the final 2013-16 FSDS.

I note your recognition of the significant progress the Government has made in implementing its FSDS, particularly since the passage of the *Federal Sustainable Development Act* in 2008. Environment Canada is committed to continuing this progress going forward.

In this respect, the draft 2013-16 FSDS builds upon the strengths of the 2010 FSDS, advancing sustainable development across the federal government. Its focus continues to be on the environmental policies and activities of the federal government, in keeping with its legislative obligations under the *Federal Sustainable Development Act* to enhance the transparency and accountability of environmental decision making. Each successive FSDS will improve in scope, measurement, and most importantly transparency. This iterative process also means that the targets in the FSDS will become more precise and specific over time as particular policies and regulations are formally established by the federal government, either on its own or in partnership with others.

Your comments on the draft FSDS have identified opportunities to strengthen the 2013-16 FSDS and future strategies, and each recommendation will be carefully considered. In terms of the general themes of your review, Environment Canada is committed to taking steps under each of them in finalizing the 2013-16 FSDS, or in preparing for the 2016-19 FSDS, as appropriate. In particular, and without foreclosing on other improvements arising out of our public consultations on the FSDS, Environment Canada will take the following steps under the major themes of your report:

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On improving the targets and implementation strategies of the 2013-16 FSDS – Environment Canada will work with departments and agencies to revise targets to reflect decisions made since the draft 2013-16 FSDS was released in February 2013, and will also continue to work with departments to improve the clarity of other targets and implementation strategies where appropriate.

On completeness of the 2013-16 FSDS – In order to improve transparency of environmental decision making, we will include in the final 2013-16 FSDS more detail on how stakeholder input is incorporated into the final FSDS. In addition, we will clarify the connections between activities covered in the FSDS and major strategic policy initiatives of the Government, continue to work to expand the voluntary participation of departments and agencies in the FSDS, and elaborate on the Government's approach to incorporating the social and economic dimensions of environmental sustainability into the Strategy.

On the Future: 2016-19 and beyond – While not a specific theme of your report, you have raised important issues that you recommend be considered in future strategies. As an iterative process, we are committed to ensuring that each subsequent cycle of the FSDS builds on lessons learned, in keeping with our FSDS management approach of “plan, do, check and improve.” Your suggestions for the 2016-19 FSDS are valuable in this respect, and we will carefully consider these in our planning for the next Strategy.

The final determination of what the FSDS contains will, of course, be subject to approval by the Minister of the Environment and his Cabinet colleagues. These decisions will be informed by the views presented in your report as the Government continues to strengthen its approach to sustainable development planning and reporting under the *Federal Sustainable Development Act*.

Sincerely,


Bob Hamilton