

# Canada's Progress on Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change

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## 2017 Fall Reports of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development

Earlier this month, the Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development (the CESD) tabled her [2017 Fall Reports](#), consisting of six documents:

- The Commissioner's Perspective,
- Report 1: Progress on Reducing Greenhouse Gases – Environment and Climate Change Canada ,
- Report 2: Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change,
- Report 3: Funding Clean Energy Technology ,
- Report 4: Reporting Progress in Implementing Sustainable Development Strategies, and
- Report 5: Environmental Petitions Annual Report and Retrospective.

In the introductory remarks, the CESD notes that the federal government still has to do “most of the hard work” to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and to adapt to climate change impacts. While the federal government has developed plans on both these fronts, the plans must still be turned into action. The CESD also notes that Canada is unlikely to meet its 2020 GHG emissions reductions targets and that the federal government has changed its focus to meeting 2030 targets.

### ***Report 1: Progress on Reducing Greenhouse Gases – Environment and Climate Change Canada***

This audit focused on whether Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) has made progress toward meeting Canada's international commitments to reduce GHG emissions. The CESD found that while the federal government has made some progress by developing a national climate change plan – the *Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change* – the measures therein have yet to be implemented.

The CESD also found that ECCC made progress on its national and international reporting on projected GHG emissions; however, it has provided no clear indication on how ECCC would measure, monitor and report on provincial and territorial contributions to meet Canada's 2030 target. Furthermore, ECCC made no progress toward meeting Canada's commitments to reduce GHG emissions. Measures sufficient to meet 2020 targets have not been implemented and the

ECCC has shifted its focus to 2030 targets.

The CESD noted that climate change is a matter of shared jurisdiction which necessitates a coordinated approach to reducing GHG emissions to avoid gaps and duplication. As well, that CESD states that coordination is needed to monitor and ensure overall effectiveness of all measures and policies.

### ***Report 2: Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change***

This audit focused on the extent to which federal organizations have made progress in adapting to climate change, and as to whether federal departments and agencies have implemented the *Federal Adaptation Policy Framework* (which has been in place since 2011). The audit did not consider whether federal adaptation programs were effective or consider actions at the municipal, provincial or territorial level.

The CESD found that ECCC did not provide adequate leadership and guidance to other federal organizations to achieve adaptation objectives. While there is a *Federal Adaptation Policy Framework* in place, the ECCC has not set priorities or developed an action plan to advance its implementation. Nor have adequate tools or resources been provided to help other departments and agencies to assess and adapt to climate change risks.

The CESD identified a need for ECCC to set priorities and identify concrete targets, timelines, actions and accountabilities that are supported by an assessment of climate change risks. This is necessary to enable each federal department or agency to understand and address the climate change risks within its areas of responsibility. Overall, few federal departments or agencies have assessed or acted on climate change risks related to their areas of responsibility.

The CESD also looked at the use of strategic environmental assessments for policy, planning and program proposals made by central agencies (i.e. the Department of Finance, the Treasury Board, and the Privy Council Office). It was found that strategic environmental assessments are not applied to most proposals by these central agencies.

### ***Report 3: Funding Clean Energy Technologies***

This audit looked at whether Natural Resources Canada and Sustainable Development Technology Canada managed demonstration projects in three federal clean energy technology funds in compliance with the conditions of those funds (i.e. the Clean Energy Fund, the ecoENERGY Technology Initiative, and the SD Tech Fund). As well, it looked at whether Natural Resources Canada and Sustainable Development Technology Canada articulated how selected funded projects were contributing to reducing GHG emissions. The CESD found that the processes in place to assess, approve and monitor projects were rigorous and objective.

#### **Report 4: Reporting Progress in Implementing Sustainable Development Strategies**

The audit considered whether federal departments applied the *Cabinet Directive on Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals*. It also considered whether selected federal departments reported on the extent and results of their strategic environmental assessment practices, and met their commitments to strengthen these practices.

Generally, it was found that federal departments did not apply the Cabinet Directive in almost 80% of proposals (although when it was applied, it was applied correctly). The CESD concluded that most federal departments need to improve their guidance and tools for applying the Cabinet Directive. While both the Privy Council Office and the Treasury Board of Canada have put guidance and other tools in place to assist other federal departments and agencies in applying the Cabinet Directive, neither took steps to confirm that the Cabinet Directive had been considered when developing proposals.

#### **Report 5: Environmental Petitions Annual Report and**

As is typical with the CESD reports, an overview of the environmental petitions and responses received over the past year was provided. Between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017, 16 environmental petitions were received. The environmental petitions originated from five provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. The CESD found no issues with the timeliness and completeness of responses by federal departments and agencies.

In addition, for the first time in 10 years, a retrospective of the environmental petitions process was conducted. The retrospective was accomplished by way of survey to past petitioners and respondents, and led to identification of several areas for improvement:

1. improve communication of the environmental petitions process to Canadians;
2. improve the manner in which the CESD assists Canadians in submitting petitions;
3. improve the assistance provided to federal departments and agencies when responding to petitions; and
4. examine other ways to incorporate petitions into the audit work done by the CESD.

Overall, the CESD's [2017 Fall Reports](#) demonstrate that Canada is likely to miss its 2020 GHG emissions reductions target. Furthermore, if Canada is to meet its 2030 GHG emissions reduction targets, concrete action (as opposed to further consultation, negotiation and planning) is necessary.

We note that a key tool for taking concrete action could be created via the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA) which governs federal environmental assessment processes. The CEAA

is currently under review (see [here](#) for information about the review process). A new and improved CEAA should include strategic environmental assessment to be used as a tool to drive national and regional GHG emissions reductions and monitoring.

### **ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTRE:**

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