

# Building the conditions for successful SEA

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# Presentation overview

1. Focus of presentation
2. The current situation at the federal level
3. Six conditions for success
4. Conclusion

# 1. Focus of presentation

- Focus on federal practice
  - SEA is also practiced in many other jurisdictions
- Forward-looking
  - Will not review the results of the 2009 government-wide evaluation of SEA practice at the federal level

## 2. The current situation

- SEA was first mandated in 1990
  - Cabinet Directive was re-written in 1999 and extended in 2004
- Implementation has been disappointing
  - CESD (2004):
    - Insufficient senior management commitment
    - Lack of central ownership and support
    - Limited integration into decision-making
    - Insufficient transparency
    - Incomplete guidance
    - Inadequate training

# 3. Identifying six conditions for success

1. Broad environmental objectives
2. Sound information base
3. Greater transparency
4. More effective policy analysis
5. Process improvements
6. Supporting political environment

A perceived lack of tools is not a major constraint to successful SEA

# 3.1 Broad environmental objectives

- Essential to guide policy development and the assessment of proposals
- Provide the answer to “how clean is clean?”
- These have not really existed to date:
  - National environmental objectives are difficult to set in a federal state
  - Departmental SDS goals are not measurable and the targets are too conservative
  - Departments continue to operate in silos (environmental policy is Environment Canada’s responsibility) with weak horizontal leadership on environmental issues
- Will the goals and targets in the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy help?

## 3.2 Sound information base

- Effective policy-making relies in large part on sound information
- Information collection, analysis and dissemination are core government responsibilities
- The federal government's investment in environmental information has long been inadequate
  - Jurisdictional issues
  - Low priority
- Funding for the Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators initiative runs out on March 31.

## 3.3 Greater transparency

- Most SEAs are conducted in secret because they address Cabinet confidences.
- More transparency is needed at the front end of the process, not just at the back
  - Policy-making requires trade-offs
  - White papers, green papers, consultation processes
- Greater transparency should help improve quality (and accountability) over time

## 3.4 More effective policy analysis

- SEA assumes a deliberate process of policy analysis that does not always exist.
- Policy analysis is more complex than ever before: horizontal issues, more actors, faster pace yet ...
- Federal capacity to conduct policy analysis has diminished:
  - Program cuts in the 1990s have not been restored fully;
  - In-house science capacity has been reduced;
  - Post-Gomery reforms have reduced the space available for informal policy dialogues between the government and stakeholders
  - Policy-making has become centralized.
- SEA cannot succeed where policy capacity is weak.

## 3.5 Process improvements

- A central agency has an essential role to play in setting expectations, cultivating a community of practice and monitoring performance. TBS plays this role for many internal government processes. A lack of an analog for SEA has allowed the process to drift.
- Need to respond to CESD observations

## 3.6 Supportive political environment

- Civil servants and politicians reflect prevailing societal values.
- The Canadian public has not demonstrated strongly enough that it wants more environmentally-sustainable policies:
  - The ecological limits are not as evident as in other countries
  - Canadian environmental lobby groups are weaker than their industrial counterparts
  - Few visionary leaders
- The capacity of the media to do investigative stories and hold the government to account on environmental matters has declined.

# 4. Conclusion

- SEA remains an essential tool to promote more sustainable forms of development
- Experience in Canada and other countries shows that SEA can be applied successfully to integrate environmental considerations into sectoral policies
- As the federal government considers how to improve SEA practice, it needs to address the deficiencies in the supporting factors that can make SEA more effective.