

*Workbook for:*

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CSIN CONFERENCE

2010



**Workbook on the  
Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators  
and the  
Federal Sustainable Development Strategy**

**Please complete the following section if you would like to receive a copy of summaries and your discussion answers (please note that workbooks will be collected following the exercise).**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please send me (check all that apply):**

**Summaries**

**My discussion answers**

## CESI AND FSDS WORKSHOP WORKBOOK

### 1 BACKGROUND

The CESI initiative is led by Environment Canada in collaboration with Health Canada and Statistics Canada. The initiative brings together environmental information from federal departments and provincial and territorial governments who share responsibilities for environmental management in Canada. Through data collection and environmental monitoring programs, the initiative produces a number of priority environmental indicators (such as air quality, water quality and greenhouse gas emissions) to deliver trend-based information on issues of importance to Canadians. While the results are not a statement on the government's performance related to the environment, they do track key environmental indicators to help guide and direct policy and programs. The initiative aims to normalize environmental indicators as the means to understand and manage environmental issues in much the same way that decision-makers and the public look to the GDP to anticipate and manage economic issues.

The *Federal Sustainable Development Act* (FSDA) received Royal Assent on June 26, 2008 and requires the development of a Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (FSDS). The FSDS is first and foremost an accountability and transparency mechanism. It is intended to help Canadians understand the federal government's environmental sustainability priorities and to assess the government's progress in achieving them. Specifically, the FSDS will provide a high-level overview of the federal government's goals, targets and implementation strategies for meeting each target; identify the Ministers responsible for meeting each target; and align the work of departments to support environmental sustainability priorities across government.

The indicators brought together and developed by CESI will be essential to the reporting and tracking of progress of the FSDS.

With its long-term goals, medium-term targets and short-term implementation strategies, the FSDS framework, along with CESI, will lay the foundation for better understanding the complete picture of the government's environmental sustainability efforts.

The workshop is designed to:

- Elicit views on appropriate roles and priorities for environmental indicators
- Elicit views on bridging the gap between indicators and meaningful information and policy decisions

## 2 WORKBOOK QUESTIONS

### Breakout Session 1: CESI

1) *Greenhouse Gas Emissions and the GDP*

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the most frequently used indicator to measure the growth of a country's economy, and its methodology is standardized internationally. However, the GDP is limited in its inclusion of non-economic issues and some say environmental indicators cannot be properly integrated into GDP measurements. While environmental data is often presented as a ratio to GDP, it can be difficult to effectively communicate and understand the linkages between the environment and the economy. The real environmental cost of economic growth is not reflected in GDP (for example, environmental disasters increase GDP).

Does public response change when environmental issues are presented alongside economic tools that they understand? More generally, how do we bridge the gap between existing indicators and meaningful information for Canadians? For example, how can we link greenhouse gas emissions indicators with socio-economic data so that it is meaningful to the public?

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3) *CESI Priorities*

The CESI initiative reports on air quality, water quality and greenhouse gas emissions, has recently expanded to report on water quantity and nature (protected areas) issues and further expansion is planned to report on progress of the FSDS. Currently, CESI’s priorities are:

- measuring progress of the FSDS goals and targets
- easy access to indicator data
- implications of the indicators (interpretation, context and supplementary indicators)
- reporting on site-level (local) and regional data and indicators
- interactive tools (maps, data charts, etc)
- transparency through clear and detailed documentation on methods and sources
- international comparisons

Of these roles and goals, which ones should be priorities? Should we work on all of them equally?

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**Breakout Session 2: FSDS**

1) *Linking Indicators with Policy Decisions*

Environmental indicators provide a simple way to convey complex information on the environment, and may be used as a basis for integrating environmental concerns into the policy process. However, research indicates that there can be disconnects between science and the policy process. Environmental indicator information is not always presented in a policy context and is often not made available in an effective format. Environmental research and reporting can be isolated from the policy process.

In your experience, how have you been able to bridge the gap between indicators and program and policy decisions? What are the challenges and how do we overcome them? How has indicator data been presented and interpreted such that it is used at all levels of decision-making?

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2) *The New Canadian Federal Sustainable Development Regime*

In 2008, Parliament re-wrote the underpinnings of federal sustainable development (SD) planning and reporting in Canada by enacting the Federal Sustainable Development Act (FSDA). This has given the federal government a strategic opportunity to redesign its policy approaches to better reflect international best practices as well as address issues noted in internal management reviews, research findings and by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development (CESD). The presentation today outlined these approaches and showed how they may contribute to bridging a science-policy gap through the strategic use of indicator information. The presentation argued that the processes are a step forward in transparency and public accounting on sustainability for the benefit of Canadians.

This is one step in the process of improving governance for SD. Where do you see opportunities for further improvements?

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