

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Minister's Round Table on Environment and Sustainable Prosperity's Report to the Minister of Environment regarding the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act (EGSPA)

The following provides a summary of key points from the Minister's Round Table on Environment and Sustainable Prosperity's final report to the Minister of Environment. Those interested in the Round Table's findings are encouraged to read the full report available at: www.gov.ns.ca/nse/dept/egspa.review.asp. It may also be helpful to reference the Act (EGSPA) while reading this summary. To view the Act, please visit www.gov.ns.ca/nse/egspa/.

Introduction

As part of the legislative requirements of the *Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act (EGSPA)*, a public review of the Act must be conducted by the provincial Round Table on Environment and Sustainable Prosperity every five years. The Round Table is a voluntary board consisting of members from academic, legal, industrial, and environmental sectors who advise Nova Scotia's Minister of Environment on environmental sustainability issues.

In September 2011, the Minister of Environment asked the Round Table to conduct a review and develop a report outlining amendments and improvements that could be made to *EGSPA*. Members were specifically asked to identify ways to better integrate environmental and economic aims in context of government priorities. A final report was provided in March 2012.

Public engagement was a key part of the *EGSPA* review. Over 80 written submissions were received, and over 70 participants attended five public workshops held across the province. Feedback was provided by environmental groups, industry associations, municipalities, and members of the public. Mi'kmaq organizations representing both on and off-reserve peoples also provided input. A summary of public feedback is provided on Nova Scotia Environment's website at www.gov.ns.ca/nse/dept/egspa.review.asp.

Overall View

EGSPA was proclaimed in June 2007 as a pioneering piece of North American legislation on sustainable development. The Round Table recognizes the positive achievements of *EGSPA*, and there is broad support by stakeholders for the integrative approach the Act strives towards. The consultations and deliberations that were part of this review have revealed a wide variety of perspectives on approaches to improve the ability of *EGSPA* to meet the fundamental Goal of the Act: "to fully integrate environmental sustainability and economic prosperity."

At least 13 of the 21 Goals in *EGSPA* have been completely or nearly achieved, with the Province making substantive and timely progress on the remaining Goals. The Round Table recommends it is generally wise to stay the course with the 21 Goals. While *EGSPA* has been good legislation for meeting environmental Goals, the link to the economy is less clear. Efforts to link the environment and economy are important and should continue.

The Round Table drew the following conclusions which underlie their recommendations and which are considered key to the success of *EGSPA* over the coming years:

- Change the focus and objectives in *EGSPA* to strengthen the integration between the environmental Goals and the economy;
- Ensure *EGSPA* aligns with, and helps to fulfill, Government's core priorities by increasing awareness of the Act within Government; increasing accountability of Departments to uphold the Act; and providing mechanisms to encourage Government Departments and sectors to pursue initiatives in accord with *EGSPA*;
- Include methods to evaluate targets and adjust as necessary; and
- Raise awareness, understanding, and support of *EGSPA* among Nova Scotia's citizens, communities, and sectors.

Recommendations by Specific Sections of the Act

The Round Table recommends the title of *The Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act* be changed to better reflect the integration of the environment and sustainable prosperity. Submissions received by the Round Table also suggested adding definitions such as "sustainability" and "sustainable prosperity" in the Act, and clarifying the linkage between the environment and economy. The Round Table also proposes that *EGSPA* be amended to reflect a shared responsibility for outcomes between the Minister of Environment and the Minister for the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism (ERDT).

The Round Table believes the principles upon which *EGSPA* is based are one of its strengths. It is recommended that a principle could be included stating an intention to use a holistic "systems" approach, which will involve all provincial Departments in meeting commitments under *EGSPA*. Consideration could also be given to adding a principle expressing the intent of the Mi'kmaq concept of Netukulimk, which is "achieving adequate standards of community and economic well-being without jeopardizing the integrity, diversity, or productivity of our environment."

The Round Table recommends that amendments be made to *EGSPA* to provide a clearer focus on an integrated environment and economy. This would include revising the long-term objectives to be more clearly understood and measured.

As a number of the Goals in the Act have been achieved, the Round Table recommends they be viewed as platforms upon which further progress is built and momentum maintained. Goals should also be clustered so they can be considered as part of broader themes or strategies contributing to the objectives of the Act. The Round Table provides examples of possible clusters, noting that careful analysis and discussion within government should occur to determine these groupings.

It should be noted that while the Round Table does not recommend any *specific* changes to the current Goals under *EGSPA*, suggestions on how these current Goals could be built upon and

enhanced, largely based on submissions received from the public, are addressed in the final report.

The Round Table recommends the Province's current "Indicators of Prosperity" report continue to be used to measure and evaluate progress towards sustainable prosperity. To enhance this report, indicators could be added that better capture the amount and quality of natural capital (such as forests and fish stocks) beyond just the economic value.

Full cost accounting can ensure that environmental gains do not come at a detriment to the economy or vice versa. The Round Table indicated that a sub-section be considered that provides for the possibility of undertaking full-cost accounting from time to time for the Goals and initiatives of *EGSPA*.

The membership of the Round Table would benefit from a periodic review to ensure there is appropriate skill and stakeholder representation on issues specific to sustainable prosperity. Constituting the Round Table under *EGSPA* (rather than under the *Environment Act*) could also be considered. While the process of this review went smoothly, the Round Table recommends extending the review period from 6 to 9 months to allow sufficient time.

The annual and periodic reports on *EGSPA* should reflect how government as a whole is embodying the principles of the Act. An appropriate revision should call on other Departments to report on initiatives that foster sustainable prosperity, which will better reflect and encourage the many initiatives already underway. The *EGSPA* annual report could also include reporting on key successes from private and non-governmental sectors.

Recommendations regarding New Goals

The Round Table received many recommendations proposing new Goals. While members were cautious in accepting new Goals, the following are themes for some potential new Goals which would help drive further achievement of *EGSPA*'s core objectives. The Round Table proposed a few topic areas for new Goals to be considered for inclusion in the Act.

The Round Table recommends consideration of a Goal to increase Nova Scotia's energy productivity by 2020. Like all forms of waste, energy waste leads to lost economic opportunity. Conversely, the reduction in energy waste can lead to economic opportunity. Energy Efficiency Nova Scotia (ENSC) has suggested, and the Round Table agrees, that research and careful analysis be done to get a better understanding of the gaps in Nova Scotia's energy productivity and set specific economic targets to complement the environmental targets currently in the Act.

The Round Table received a significant number of submissions calling for the development of a sustainable transportation strategy. Members felt they were not in the position to evaluate each of the suggested options, but generally recommend the adoption of a sustainable transportation strategy as part of *EGSPA*.

It is important that the Province's vision for continued economic growth feature sustainable prosperity as a core concept. The current provincial economic growth strategy, *jobsHere*, implicitly recognizes that good environmental practices can lead to reduced costs and increased competitiveness for business and industry. The Round Table recommends the development of a Green Economy and Jobs Labour Market Strategy that is linked to *jobsHere*. *EGSPA* could also serve as a lens through which major economic decisions could be assessed for a variety of economic sectors, with examples described in the final report.

The Round Table recommends a Goal to consider an optimal mix of renewable energy sources to support both competitive electricity rates for businesses and citizens, and *EGSPA* Goals regarding cleaner and renewable energy diversity. The next step should likely be a study of the relationships between energy production, security, and cost alternatives.

To date, *EGSPA* has been framed in the context of environment and economy. Looking forward, the Round Table believes the social component of sustainable prosperity (such as health care, education, rural and community vitality) needs to be integrated with environment and economy. In the interim, it is recommended that opportunities be sought to extend *EGSPA*'s principles as a framework for solving complex problems related to sustainability.

The Round Table believes it is time for the Governor in Council to develop and implement stewardship programs and measures to help carry out the integrated environmental and economic objectives of *EGSPA*. Examples could be economic instruments that contribute to meeting Goals which carry substantive costs and education and awareness programs.

Lastly, the Round Table recommends consideration be given to regulations under *EGSPA*. Regulations could provide a means to construct, implement and enforce actions that support the objectives and Goals of the Act. Beyond regulation, Government should continue to be open to and encourage a variety of relevant policy instruments. This approach would help *EGSPA* to be a more flexible, dynamic tool adapted more easily to changing conditions and context.

Conclusion

The Round Table members are appreciative of the considerable effort of citizens and stakeholder groups in providing submissions and representations during the review. While the Round Table cannot reply to every submission, key points will be distilled and considered as part of the Round Table's ongoing work.