

Missing Values:



An Environmental Review of the 1999 - 2000 Ministry Business Plans

Prepared by:

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The Conservation Council of Ontario
February, 2000



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This report has been prepared as a research report to the Conservation Council of Ontario. It has been approved for release by the Board of Directors of the Council.

Contributions from the members of the Council were solicited in the preparation of this review, however the report's conclusions and recommendations are those of the principal author.

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Executive Summary



At the heart of any government is its values: the beliefs which drive the policy and actions of the government.

At the heart of a good government is the ability to integrate society's predominant values into its policies and actions.

In December 1999, the Ontario government published its 1999 - 2000 Ministry Business Plans. These plans outline the government's commitments for the upcoming year.

This paper applies Ontario's environmental values to a review of the 1999 - 2000 Ministry Business plans of thirteen ministries. The ministries were selected because they are all required to produce a formal Statement of Environmental Values under the Environmental Bill of Rights, and to apply these values in all major decisions that might affect the environment. The review compares the commitments of the Business Plans with the commitments outlined in the Statements of Environmental Values.

The results are disappointing. For the fourth consecutive year, the published Ministry Business Plans have failed to take into account the Statements of Environmental Values.

This year, the omission is made worse by the fact that Management Board Secretariat had promised the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario that it had added environmental considerations into the 1999-2000 business planning framework for all ministries. The Commissioner reported in her 1998 report that, "in preparing next year's Business Plans, each EBR ministry is being asked to describe its strategy for honouring its Statement of Environmental Values".

The Chair of Management Board, Chris Hodgson, has indicated that the guidelines for 1999 - 2000 did include the requirement that ministries affected by the EBR develop a "high level strategy" to address how the ministry is honouring its Statement of Environmental Values, and that ministries are instructed to refer to their key strategies in the published business plans and annual reports (see Appendix 1).

The review of the 1999-2000 Business Plans for each of the thirteen ministries shows that ten ministries have, at best, only a cursory reference to their Statement of Environmental Values and many of their proposed activities demonstrate a complete disregard for the environment.

The Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Natural Resources have done the best job of integrating the SEV into their Business Plans. This is understandable, given that they both have environmental protection as a core business.

The Ministry of Energy, Science and Technology incorporated its SEV into the section on energy, but completely overlooked environmental issues and values in the science and technology section.

In some instances, ministries have set up, or are proposing, agencies to take over the traditional supervisory functions of the government. The Technical Standards Safety Authority under the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations is a case in point. The Ministry's Business Plan makes no mention of its

responsibility in the management of fuel storage facilities, even though it is the most significant commitment listed in its Statement of Environmental Values. In these cases, the Ministry still has the overall responsibility for the issue, and it should be reflected in its business plan.

The most serious failure is in the area of land use planning and the protection of natural areas and prime agricultural land.

- Municipal Affairs and Housing makes no reference to the protection of natural areas and agricultural land. It does include a commitment to change the Ministry's role in planning from "reviewing and approving" to one of "advising municipalities on how to prepare or review their own planning documents", and a commitment to "work toward a strong housing market and construction industry that contribute to economic prosperity".
- Transportation has devoted 85 per cent of its budget to highways and road safety. There is no direct reference or support for public transit.
- Management Board has committed to selling \$200 million in real estate assets. Included in this package is 4,000 acres of agricultural land in the Pickering area.

In short, the poor level of integration of the Statements of Environmental Values into the Ministry Business Plans has led to commitments that will have a significant effect on the environment, both in the immediate future and in terms of the long term sustainability of Ontario's economy and society.

The lack of attention to controlling urban sprawl through government policy and ministry activities is a major factor behind the recent controversy over development proposals in the Oak Ridges Moraine. The government policy statement under the Planning Act on the protection of natural heritage features and sensitive groundwater recharge areas is clear. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs has a mandate and a responsibility to show leadership in this area.

In the long run, increased urban sprawl will result in the unnecessary loss of prime agricultural land, natural areas, and ecological functions. Ontario's food security will be diminished through an increased reliance on imported produce. Natural recreation opportunities will be diminished, and the integrity of wildlife ecosystems and corridors will be compromised. The demand for groundwater will increase, and the recharge capability of the aquifers will decrease. The demand for precious and non-renewable resources (such as aggregates and gasoline) will increase. Increased dependency on automobiles and longer trip times will lead to increases in air emissions which cause climate change and contribute to respiratory problems.

These are all serious consequences of bad planning. They can be easily corrected by re-establishing a provincial commitment to promoting compact development, urban re-development and intensification, and healthy community planning.

The government is currently preparing the next round of business plans for the 2000 - 2001 fiscal year (starting April 1, 2000). This report concludes with a list of recommendations for how the government and the ministries can begin to address and incorporate environmental values into their business plans, policies and programs.

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

1. **Business Plans are a good initiative in that they are an effective means for communicating government priorities and commitments.**

Whether they improve the accountability of government, as Management Board Chair Chris Hodgson says, remains to be seen. It depends on how well the government responds to the analysis and recommendations in reports such as this one.

2. **Ten of the thirteen Business plans reviewed in this study failed to incorporate adequate recognition of Ministry Statements of Environmental Values.**

Four ministries failed to incorporate environmental values into their business plans but did include commitments that will have a major negative impact on the environment. They are:

- **Economic Development and Trade** (climate change as a trade barrier)
- **Management Board** (sale of 4,000 acres of agricultural land)
- **Municipal Affairs and Housing** (urban development)
- **Transportation** (highway development)

Five ministries failed to incorporate environmental values into their business plan, the absence of which may have significant environmental implications. They are:

- **Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs** (pollution, energy, biotechnology, and rural development)
- **Consumer and Corporate Relations** (fuel storage and groundwater contamination)
- **Energy Science and Technology - Technology section** (technology development and biotechnology)
- **Health and Long Term Care** (hospital incineration, environmental carcinogens)
- **Northern Development and Mines** (northern development and mineral development)

Three Ministries incorporated environmental issues and values into their plans, but in each case there is substantial room for improvement:

- **Energy, Science and Technology - Energy section**
- **Environment**
- **Natural Resources**

3. **The government lacks the capacity to react to emerging environmental crises.**

- Many of the issues identified in this report are likely to become more serious over the course of the next ten to twenty years.
- The development oriented ministries are the most poorly equipped to handle environmental issues. These ministries are: Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Economic Development and Trade, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Transportation.

4. **The government's unsustainable approach to economic growth and development will lead to significant environmental impacts.**

- weak provincial planning is allowing urban sprawl and the continued loss of significant natural and agricultural areas;
- the government is promoting rural development without consideration of environmentally appropriate development;

- the emphasis on highway development, combined with the absence of support for public transit and rail, will further promote urban sprawl and a car-dependent society. This will inevitably lead to increased energy consumption, a decline in air quality, and an increase in greenhouse gases.

5. The omission of environmental values in the 1999-2000 business plans contravenes the requirements of the Environmental Bill of Rights and the Management Board guidelines.

- The government has reneged on the commitment it made to the Environmental Commissioner in 1999 to include strategies for honouring SEVs in the 1999-2000 business plans.
- This failure to meet the requirements of the EBR takes on additional significance when compared with the current government's attempt to require future governments to raise taxes and/or approve a deficit budget (the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act). The purpose of the Environmental Bill of Rights is to ensure that governments operate in an environmentally sustainable manner; or, in other words, that they do not incur an ecological deficit. If the government will not respect previous legislation outlining the requirements for good governance, how can it expect that future governments will respect its legislation?
- the Conservation Council of Ontario will consider applying for a formal review of the Ministry Business Plans under the Environmental Bill of Rights if the environmental values are not addressed in the 2000-2001 business plans.

6. Major changes are required to the business plans to fully integrate environmental sustainability into the government's mandate.

- Integrating environmental values is not a simple matter of adding a statement that "the ministry will consider its SEV in all major policy decisions that affect the environment". Nor is it a matter of adding a couple of research and education programs.
- Integrating environmental values means that each ministry needs to re-evaluate its entire business plan in order that its goals, targets, and commitments fully reflect Ontario's goals for a healthy environment.

7. Ministry Statements of Environmental Values do not adequately reflect the purposes of the Environmental Bill of Rights.

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs does not identify any environmental issues as they relate to the Ministry.
- The Ministry of Energy, Science and Technology's SEV contains no environmental values for the Technology section of the ministry
- Few of the SEVs directly address the purposes of the Environmental Bill of Rights as laid out in Sections 2 (1) and 2 (2)
- For those ministries that choose to revise their SEV according to the core businesses of their business plan, the requirement should be to apply all the purposes of the EBR to each core business.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in an effort to assist the province to meet its requirements under the Environmental Bill of Rights, and to facilitate the integration of environmental values with the current economic agenda of the government.

Recommendation #1: Provincial Vision Statement

The Province should develop and adopt a Provincial Vision Statement that encapsulates and reflects the aspirations of the people of Ontario for individual health and well-being; healthy communities and cultures; clean and healthy ecosystems; and a prosperous and sustainable economy.

Recommendation #2: Ministry Vision Statements

Ministries should revise their Vision Statements in order that they reflect an awareness of all appropriate provincial goals, including the health of the environment.

Recommendation #3: Statements of Environmental Values

The Province should enforce the requirement under the Environmental Bill of Rights that ministries explain how the purposes of the Act will be applied to their ministry through their Statements of Environmental Values.

Recommendation #4: Integrating Environmental Values into Ministry Business Plans

The Province should demonstrate a significant commitment to Ontario's Environmental Values in the 2000 - 2001 business plans.

Recommendation #5: Documenting Environmental Considerations

Each Ministry with a Statement of Environmental Values should publish an annual summary of how it has considered these values in its activities.

Recommendation # 6: An Environmental Plan for Ontario

The Province should develop a cross-ministry environmental plan that will indicate how each ministry is contributing to solving the most significant environmental and conservation problems facing the province.

Recommendation # 7: Public and Stakeholder Consultation

The Province should seek to improve its public and stakeholder consultation processes in order to develop an improved understanding of the predominant social values and goals, and to assist in reflecting these values in its business plans, strategies, policies and new initiatives.