

May 12, 2010

Honourable Sterling Belliveau
Minister
Department of Environment
5151 Terminal Road
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Mr. Belliveau

This letter from the Round Table provides you and your colleagues with our annual assessment of the Province's progress in satisfying the intent and goals in the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act. Overall, the Province continues to make progress in satisfying most of the goals set for the years 2007 to 2009.

In particular, we note that the Provincial Government adopted a sustainable procurement policy in 2009. Although the operational details are still being worked out, the signal sent by the government to its suppliers is indeed noteworthy. We also note that the Government has announced changes to the renewable energy goals which go far beyond those in the Act. Changes to the building code regulations have come into effect one year early and were expanded to include major renovations and small commercial buildings. Significant progress has been made in establishing an energy efficient and environmentally sustainable demonstration building on the site of the NSCC Waterfront Campus in Dartmouth well in advance of the 2015 target date. Nova Scotia Power has met and exceeded the government's requirements for nitrogen oxide emissions.

However some goals have been missed or remain elusive. The wetland policy scheduled for release in 2009 has been delayed. The Round Table believes that thorough consultation is important and necessary to gain support for new policies. However we caution that the Departments tasked with the responsibilities associated with EGSPA must put the necessary resources into the process. This will be particularly important in the case of the water strategy, a resource that involves every Nova Scotian. We noted last year our concern that mandatory labeling was not pursued as we believed such labeling would benefit buyers. Further we convey our continuing distress about delays in a number of municipalities which have not met the 2008 municipal drinking water standards.

Beyond tracking progress toward specific goals, it is with the intent of the Act wherein the Round Table has greater concerns. We believe that it is quite important to explain to Nova Scotians not only what the targets are, but also how the targets will be reached and who will be involved in reaching them. We would like to see more detail in the sections answering the question "how will we reach our target?" For example, information on the nature of consultations and dates would be helpful. This is necessary to further engage Nova Scotians in discussing the intent of the Act, its goals and targets.

As we move toward a public review of the Act in 2012 as required in the legislation, much more effort must be devoted to informing Nova Scotians about the Act and educating them about its objectives and intent. We collectively have an opportunity to involve Nova Scotians in creating “one of the cleanest and most sustainable environments in the world” but it must involve each and everyone of us! This can only be achieved by creating more ways to engage people, communities, businesses, organizations and schools in urban as well as rural areas of the Province. One Round Table member put this eloquently: “What we need to do in Nova Scotia is create an environment that will encourage industry to not only accept the EGSPA goals but will take measures to incorporate changes in their business environment that will enable them to achieve the goals.” The various strategies which have been or are being developed are interconnected and how the government is planning to manage interrelationships and leverage synergies among strategies must be explained to stakeholders. For example the wetland policy, the coastal management strategy, and the climate change strategy will all implicate municipalities particularly with regard to adaptation policy and planning.

In Nova Scotia, sustainable prosperity is based on strengthening five capitals, namely natural, economic, social, human and built. The Provincial Government has made a commendable start at identifying indicators that will give Nova Scotians a means of measuring whether this is actually occurring. Unfortunately it is not possible at this time to easily link the proposed indicators with the five capitals. We encourage the responsible agencies to continue this work and to provide indicators that not only give the status of the measure but also its trend. While the Provincial Government works on a comprehensive and more appropriate approach to reporting on sustainable prosperity, it would also be helpful to include different ways of reporting GDP for comparative purposes including GDP per capita. The Government must continue its effort to demonstrate the integration of economic prosperity and environmental sustainability into sustainable prosperity. This is at the heart of the Act.

Finally, we have noted in the past that as the Act was designed to foster the integration of environment and economy, more effort must be devoted to exploring the costs and benefits associated with the goals and targets. There are at least three aspects that must be considered. These are the costs associated with implementing the target, the costs that may be involved if the issue is not addressed and the benefits to the economy and the environment that will be derived from implementing the goal with special emphasis on jobs. The Round Table recognizes that some of these will be more challenging than others. Therefore, we recommend that the Government proceed with a pilot project in 2010-2011 that will involve calculating costs and benefits of 2 or 3 goals and targets. It would be very helpful to have this analysis done before consultations begin in 2012. Paraphrasing a comment from one Round Table member “our challenge is about how to reconcile the divergent circumstances, opportunities and interests and find ways to collaboratively advance a society that finds value in both.”

The Round Table looks forward to continuing progress in implementing the intent, goals and targets in the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act. This is a unique and important piece of legislation that places Nova Scotia at the forefront of jurisdictions around the world concerned with sustainability.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Raymond P. Côté". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Raymond P. Côté
Chair