

Sustainability of Natural Resources - What Does it Mean and How Do We Get There?

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Nova Scotia is committed by policy (Opportunities for Sustainable Prosperity, 2006), legislation (*Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act* or EGSPA, 2007) and the expressed wishes of the public to embrace the concept of sustainability. As we move toward sustainability in the minerals sector, it is worth considering whether there is a shared understanding of what the concept means in a minerals context, how it is being dealt with elsewhere, and how we can tell if we are moving in a sustainable direction.

The oft-quoted definition of sustainability, found in the 1987 Brundtland report (*Our Common Future*), is: development that “*meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*” A more detailed vision of how the concept of sustainability applies to the development of mineral resources has been set out in the Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development project of the International Institute for Environment and Development in its report *Breaking New Ground* (2002). Sustainable development is described as: “*one of a range of ideas about how humans should best interact with each other and the biosphere. It involves integrating and meeting economic, social, and environmental goals.*”

Most thoughtful considerations of the nature of sustainable development in the minerals sector today consider it to require an integration of economic, environmental and social goals. This is at the core of mining industry association initiatives to define and implement sustainability (i.e. MAC’s Towards Sustainable Mining initiative). Many mining companies have embraced vision statements for sustainability that include specific reference to these three aspects of their activities.

In Nova Scotia, the success of the movement toward sustainability will be partly judged by our success in meeting the goals of EGSPA. The mining industry, which is already well-versed in dealing with economic and environmental issues, is now increasingly faced with the need to integrate social concerns into its planning. This is likely to increase in the future with increased requirements and expectations for community engagement in projects that may affect them. At the same time, government will need to continue to re-evaluate its priorities, seeking the appropriate balance in programs, policies and legislation that will address the broad spectrum of economic, environmental and social needs.

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