

April 1, 2008

Hon. Mark Parent  
Minister of Environment  
5151 Terminal Road, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 2T8

Dear Minister Parent

As you know, the Round Table on the Environment and Sustainable Prosperity was established by the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act and members were announced in the Legislature in late fall. We held our first meeting in January to become familiar with our guiding principles and terms of reference. Our second meeting, held on March 26, 2008 was largely devoted to reviewing and commenting on the first progress report on the implementation of the Act which will be tabled shortly.

As a group of Nova Scotians and people from many of the organizations that support civil society in its many endeavours, the Round Table is pleased to see this first report. It is heartening that the Provincial Government is committed to reporting on the progress of such an important piece of legislation annually. This first report begins to give Nova Scotians an appreciation of the commitment of their provincial government to making the province of Nova Scotia one of the most sustainable environments in the world by 2020. The report should also give Nova Scotians a sense of the challenge that lies ahead. Because, while government has established these goals, quite clearly, it cannot achieve them without the involvement and support of citizens, communities, businesses and others. With this in mind, it is very important that the report sets a positive but realistic tone.

There will undoubtedly be some debate as to whether the goals are correct, more or less stringent than they should be to meet the challenges that we will face in the future. However, the Act and its goals are a positive first step in a process leading to sustainable prosperity.

The Round Table appreciates that the emphasis of the Act, as reflected in its goals, is the natural environment, given the disturbing trends that have emerged in the past 25 years. These include the cod fishery collapse and climate change. However the Act also refers to economic prosperity and a goal of “economic performance equal to or greater than the Canadian average by 2020”. There is increasing appreciation of the interconnections between the environment and the economy. In fact, the Act sets the full integration of environmental sustainability and economic prosperity as its long-term

objective. Therefore we believe that it will be important in the future to incorporate economic indicators and eventually indicators of social well-being into one common report so that Nova Scotians can get an overall sense of progress toward sustainable prosperity.

To get Nova Scotians to appreciate the challenge and their role as citizens, producers and consumers in achieving the goals, they must be informed. We urge the government to devote the necessary resources to popularizing the report for appropriate audiences. In addition, more education will be required to engender the necessary commitment and involvement. The Round Table is reminded of the process in which Nova Scotians were involved to divert 50% of our solid waste from landfills and become a national and international leader. We believe that a similar approach might bear fruit with other goals. It is critical that Nova Scotians must buy into this vision if the goals are to be achieved. Of course, two of the best indicators of success will be the jobs and economic opportunities associated with the development path charted by the Act.

We know that the government has limited resources. We also recognize that target dates have been established for the achievement of goals. Some of these are more straightforward and readily achievable than others. For example, the greenhouse gas reduction goal will require a multi-faceted effort involving decisions that will have to be taken many years before the target date. Therefore we urge you and your colleagues to take a very strategic approach in selecting policies and actions that will cause substantial changes in behaviour on the part of citizens, communities, industry and governments. The underlying idea is to keep one's eye on the outcome that we all desire. Using our resources, our capital, more effectively and efficiently through practices such as demand-side management will be increasingly important to our future well-being

We note that one goal will not be achieved this year. In section 4(2)(j), there is a commitment that all public drinking water supplies would meet the new treatment standards by 2008. Twenty-five percent of the public water supplies may not satisfy the standard this year. We appreciate that this has been a challenge for some municipalities but we encourage the provincial government to strengthen its efforts so that Nova Scotians are informed of progress and can be certain that their drinking water remains "among the best in the world."

The Round Table encourages the government to recognize that the activities that will support the implementation of the Act are an investment in our future, that of our children and other species in the province. There are many opportunities for the business community to improve efficiency and profitability by making such investments. There will be costs but there will also be benefits, both environmental and economic, which may not be fully tangible at this point in time.

We look forward to a continuing dialogue with you and the Government on matters related to the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act and appreciate the opportunity to comment on progress in its implementation.

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  
Round Table on the Environment and  
Sustainable Prosperity

**Outline of some key issues to be addressed as the Act and the Strategy are implemented:**

While these issues have not been thoroughly explored by the Round Table at its first two meetings, they have emerged as important issues that the Cabinet and the Deputy-Ministers Council on Sustainable Prosperity will have to take into account.

1. The Round Table believes that it will be increasingly important that key players including the Round Table itself, the Cabinet, Members of the Legislature, and senior officials are all speaking a common language related to sustainable prosperity.
2. Although there will be pressure to focus on costs of implementation, you and your colleagues should also consider the benefits. The costs of not taking action should also be factored into the debate.
3. The cost effectiveness of policies, measures and activities identified to achieve the goals should be thoroughly investigated and every effort should be made to ensure that policy and regulatory changes influence responsible and sustainable production and consumption in substantive ways.
4. Businesses, and especially small businesses, are the backbone of the economy and are already under considerable pressure. Initiatives taken pursuant to the Act should recognize this fact.
5. As we progress down this exciting path, we should always look for best practices from other relevant jurisdictions, so that we are comparing ourselves with leaders. We feel that there are opportunities to utilize these lessons to improve economic and environmental efficiency of Nova Scotia.
6. The Round Table is very interested in the emerging discussions about additional indicators to the use of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the ultimate measure of sustainable prosperity. We would appreciate being consulted as these discussions unfold.
7. Eventually the report should probably contain indicators for each of the five capitals which underpin the Opportunities for Sustainable Prosperity strategy as the latter and the Act are interconnected.

