

Appendix A—Previous Work of the Office of the Auditor General and the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development

Our Office has conducted numerous audits and studies of matters that bear on sustainable development in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin. The following are some of the issues we examined and our main findings:

- **Climate change** is considered one of the greatest threats to the integrity of the basin. Chapter 3 of the Commissioner's 1998 Report (Responding to Climate Change—Time to Rethink Canada's Implementation Strategy) found that Canada was not expected to meet long-standing domestic and international commitments to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions. We attributed this failure primarily to poor planning and ineffective management. We update our work in Chapter 6 of this report.
- **Urban smog** is a serious form of air pollution for many Canadians living in the Windsor–Quebec corridor. Chapter 4 (Smog: Our Health at Risk) of the Commissioner's 2000 Report found that while federal and provincial governments had set sound strategic direction through development of a national plan, the plan was destined to fail: governments and their partners never reached agreement on how to implement it.
- **Toxic substances** such as industrial chemicals, pesticides, and waste byproducts are a major cause of pollution in our lakes, rivers, air, and land. Chapter 3 (Understanding the Risks from Toxic Substances: Cracks in the Foundation of the Federal House) and Chapter 4 (Managing the Risks of Toxic Substances: Obstacles to Progress) of the Commissioner's 1999 Report raised concerns about the weakened state of scientific research and environmental monitoring, the slow progress in reducing releases of toxic substances into the environment, the government's growing reliance on voluntary controls of high-priority substances, the lack of a pesticide risk reduction strategy, and the sometimes divisive relations among federal departments.
- **Federal contaminated sites** pose a risk to the public in the release of harmful substances. Chapter 22 (Federal Contaminated Sites—Management Information on Environmental Costs and Liabilities) of the Auditor General's November 1996 Report, and our subsequent follow-up work, heavily criticized the government for its failure to identify and characterize—let alone remediate—hundreds of federally owned contaminated properties in Canada, many of them in the basin. The government still does not have a consolidated cleanup plan for its sites.
- **Loss of biodiversity** relates to the protection of species and spaces at risk. Chapter 4 (Canada's Biodiversity Clock Is Ticking) of the Commissioner's 1998 Report raised concern about slow progress in acting on the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy and cited the need for a more cohesive federal implementation plan.
- **Transboundary hazardous waste** was the subject of an audit that assessed whether the federal government had an effective regime for controlling its transport. Chapter 4 (Control of the Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Waste) of the Auditor General's April 1997 Report pointed to significant deficiencies in the enforcement of federal laws.
- **Ozone layer protection** reviewed the government's progress in dealing with this global environmental threat. In Chapter 27 (Ozone Layer Protection: The Unfinished Journey) of the Auditor General's December 1997 Report, as well as in Chapter 2 (Working Globally—Canada's International Environmental Commitments) of the Commissioner's 1998 Report, we credited the federal government for its leadership in implementing controls on ozone-depleting substances and meeting its international commitments. We also flagged the importance of maintaining a long-term perspective and focussing future efforts where they mattered the most.
- **Environmental assessment** is a key tool for preventing environmental harm caused by various projects. Chapter 6 (Environmental Assessment—A Critical Tool for Sustainable Development) of the Commissioner's 1998 Report found significant weaknesses in implementing the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* and a lack of rigorous assessments under the *Fisheries Act* (related to fish habitat). We also found poor compliance with the 1990 Cabinet directive that required departments to assess the environmental effects of federal policy and program initiatives submitted for Cabinet's consideration.
- **Tracking compliance with international agreements** is critical to the environment and to Canada's reputation. Chapter 2 (Working Globally—Canada's International Environmental Commitments) of the Commissioner's 1998

Report found that Canada does not systematically track implementation of the nearly 230 international environmental agreements and instruments that it is party to or has endorsed.

- **Freshwater pollution** in the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence River and the Fraser River and along the Atlantic Coast was an audit subject in the past. Chapter 14 (The Control and Clean-up of Freshwater Pollution) of the Auditor General's 1993 Report, as well as follow-up recommendations in the 1995 Report, found that action plans for the management of water quality needed more attention from the federal government. The need for a federal framework of water quality objectives and for federal long-term strategic planning was also identified.
- **Partnerships for sustainable development** were the focus of a study that looked specifically at the use of partnering arrangements in the environmental field. In chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the Commissioner's 2000 Report, we concluded that key success factors for successful partnerships include clear and realistic objectives and expectations for results, shared or complementary goals, effective and committed individuals, clear benefits for participating organizations, and senior management's interest.
- **New governance arrangements** with external partners are increasingly used to deliver federal programs and services to Canadians. Chapter 23 (Involving Others in Governing: Accountability at Risk) of the Auditor General's November 1999 Report found that under many of these arrangements, Parliament has limited means—in some cases, no means—of holding the government to account for the federal functions performed or the federal objectives to be achieved.
- **Reporting performance to Parliament** is critical to effective accountability. Chapter 19 (Reporting Performance to Parliament: Progress Too Slow) of the Auditor General's 2000 Report found persistent deficiencies, including a lack of concrete, measurable expectations; too much focus on reporting of activities instead of outcomes; very little linking of financial and non-financial information; and an overall lack of balance (reporting of good news only).
- **Science and technology** was the subject of work that assessed whether the federal government had met its commitments to manage its science and technology portfolio more strategically. In Chapter 9 (Science and Technology—Overall Management of Federal Science and Technology Activities) and Chapter 10 (Science and Technology—Management of Departmental Science and Technology Activities) of the Auditor General's 1994 Report, we noted that there had been a lot of activity but few results. We attributed the lack of progress to a lack of overall government-wide leadership, direction, and accountability for implementing desired changes. Our follow-up in Chapter 15 (Federal Science and Technology Activities—Follow-up) of the Auditor General's 1996 Report noted considerable progress by the government, but we reiterated our concern about the need for leadership and effective accountability for results.