

**Office of the Auditor General of Canada and the  
Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable  
Development**

# **The Environmental Petitions Process**

**Kimberley Leach**

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Commission for Environmental Cooperation of North America

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# Objectives

- To describe the environmental petitions process, a mechanism for providing environmental information
  - ❖ What is the petitions process?
  - ❖ How does it work?
  - ❖ Who uses the petitions process?
  - ❖ Examples
  - ❖ Impact/ Results of Petitions
  - ❖ Linkages to CEC factual records

# Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development

- The *Auditor General Act* was amended in 1995 to strengthen the federal government's efforts to protect the environment and promote sustainable development.
- The CESD is the environmental arm of the Office of the Auditor General of Canada:
  - ❖ Audits federal government's commitments to the environment and sustainable development
  - ❖ Monitors federal government's progress in achieving sustainable development goals
  - ❖ Manages the environmental petitions process
  - ❖ Reports to Parliament once a year

# What is the Environmental Petitions Process?

- Allows Canadians to bring concerns and questions about the environment to the attention of federal ministers.
- Citizens and organizations use the process to ask ministers to:
  - ❖ Investigate environmental problems; explain federal policy or action; examine the enforcement of environmental legislation; and provide specific information on environmental matters.
- On behalf of the AG, the CESD receives petitions, oversees the petitions process, and reports on petitions to the House of Commons.

# How does it work?

- Individuals or organizations write a letter to the Auditor General of Canada or the CESD.
- CESD reviews the petition to ensure it meets the requirements of the Act:
  - ❖ Submitted and signed by a Canadian resident;
  - ❖ Deals with an environmental issue in the context of sustainable development;
  - ❖ Responsibility of a federal department or agency subject to the petitions process.
- CESD determines which federal departments are responsible and sends it to ministers who must respond to petitioners within 120 days.

# Role of the CESD in Petitions

- Monitoring: ensure ministers respond on time, and that responses are complete and substantive
- Reporting: annual report to Parliament
- Posting: posting petitions, replies and summary information on OAG web site
- Auditing:
  - ❖ Petition response audits
  - ❖ Follow up on petitions responses in other audit work

# Who uses it?

- Almost 200 petitions since 1996
- From every province
- Nearly a 50/50 split between individuals organizations
- Wide scope and variety of issues
- Most petitioned departments:
  - ❖ Fisheries and Oceans Canada
  - ❖ Environment Canada

# Main petition topics

- Top issues:
  - ❖ Fisheries Issues (39%)
  - ❖ Biological Diversity (36%)
  - ❖ Environmental Assessment (33%)
- Other issues of interest:
  - ❖ Aboriginal Issues (13%)
  - ❖ Climate Change (10%)
  - ❖ International/ Bilateral issues (20%)



# Examples

- ❖ Sydney Tar Ponds – CEAA (140)
- ❖ Gravel removal in Fraser River (135)
- ❖ Cultus Lake and Sakinaw Lake salmon (149)
- ❖ Mid-Canada radar line sites (132)
- ❖ Oil and gas subsidies vs. GHG – (158)

## International issues

- ❖ Air pollution – border crossing in Windsor (83)
- ❖ International trade and the environment (77, 9)
- ❖ GMO (Starlink corn/ Cartagena protocol) (34/ 152)
- ❖ Pesticides in shipping containers (126)
- ❖ EIA on Peace Bridge between Ontario and New York (113)
- ❖ Hazardous Waste Facility in Belledune (102)
- ❖ Dying Trumpeter Swans in BC (99)
- ❖ Metal Mining in BC (95)
- ❖ EI in Great lakes (74)

# Impact

- Connects the CESD with Canadians
- Allows us to audit issues that otherwise may not have come to our attention
- Promotes transparency and openness
- Allows Canadians to highlight an issue, take action and get answers

# Results

- Petitions have resulted in action and change
  - ✓ Environmental investigations
  - ✓ New or amended government processes and procedures
- Key supports for the process:
  - ❖ Annual report to Parliament
  - ❖ Audit of petition responses
  - ❖ Public record

# Factual records and petitions

- CEC example was important in the development of the petitions process
  - ❖ Procedures
  - ❖ Openness and transparency
- Petitions and factual records share
  - ❖ subject matter
  - ❖ petitioners
- Use results of factual records in our work

# Contact us

E-mail:

[www.oag-bvg.gc.ca](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca)

Office of the Auditor General of Canada

Attention:

Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable  
Development

Petitions

240 Sparks Street

Ottawa, Ontario

K1A 0G6

