



REPORT TO COUNCIL: NO: 99-01

RE: Summary of Round Table Discussion on the Commission for Environmental Cooperation's (CEC) Three-Year Program Plan 1999–2001

Introduction

The Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) is pleased to present this report to the Council members of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). It has been prepared following presentations and discussions between JPAC members and the public during a round table on the CEC's Three-Year Program Plan 1999–2001, held on 25 March 1999 in Mexico City and attended by some 150 individuals. The following comments are intended to inform and provide direction to the Program Plan as it evolves, in order that it may better respond to the needs of the three countries.

The JPAC Chair for 1999, Mr. Jonathan Plaut opened the session by welcoming the participants and expressing JPAC's enthusiasm for the impressive attendance. He asked the participants to focus on substance and to provide views, both positive and negative, identifying opportunity for improvement, and signaling gaps. He impressed upon the group the importance of these round table sessions as an opportunity to be "ahead of the curve" and noted that the Parties were present and listening to the interventions.

He then asked Ms. Janine Ferretti, the Interim Executive Director of the CEC to introduce the Program Plan.

- The 1999–2001 Program Plan combines ongoing projects from 1998 and new initiatives. It is an operational plan to pursue the dual objective of the CEC Council's "Shared Agenda for Action": promoting both environmental sustainability and also protection of the North American Environment.
- The four program areas respond thematically to these two objectives and are divided into programs as administrative units. The projects in each program are tools for implementing program work. Projects will be continually adjusted, based on results. A very important element in meeting these objectives is public participation. As well, capacity building and citizen involvement are key elements in each project. It is important to receive the public's views during these round tables on how best to strengthen these two elements.
- An annual review of the Three-Year Program Plan will take place to accommodate new regional opportunities and challenges. When formulating the 2000–2002 Program Plan, the CEC will be informed of the results of these round tables.

The floor was then opened to the public for their comments on the Three-Year Program Plan. These follow, listed by program area.

**Environment, Economy and Trade
Conservation of Biodiversity**

- It is extremely important to focus on trends. Climate change, for example, needs more attention. This is a critical and emerging sustainable development issue. We have clean development mechanism as a joint implementation process related to the Kyoto Protocol, but this is not enough. NAFTA provides an opportunity for our three countries to help move this important area forward, particularly with regard to developing countries.
- There should be a move to recognize the value and benefits of natural gas in reducing carbon intensity.
- Barriers to better integration among energy producers of the three countries can be overcome with a thoughtful, global approach. This could be a role for the CEC.
- The National Polytechnic Institute (Mexico) has the capacity to participate in the development of the Program Plan. Access to information about the long-range transport of pollutants and migratory birds is required. The institute could make a valuable contribution to this work.
- The CEC should increase its effort to communicate its work to the public by better use of the media. It should not be just at the level of experts and those who are already convinced that there are problems and important issues to deal with. The general public needs more information to better understand concepts that we use daily, such as climate change and biodiversity. We need to help the public to better inform the CEC in concrete ways.
- Better linkages are required between the CEC and NAFEC projects. Why is there such a focus on shade coffee? Primary production is much broader. There is a need for an inventory of the supply and demand for sustainable products to inform the future work of the CEC.
- One of the important functions of the CEC is to build networks between specialists and non-specialists as a way to mobilize civil society. Technical documents should be produced for lay people. Environmental education should be organized with specific sectors of the public in mind.
- There should be more focus on sustainable development as a means for mobilizing civil society. It is not just a question of pollution. This is just part of the picture. This is very important in Mexico as a way of incorporating the social interests of those people affected.
- The CEC should create databases to allow the tracking of results for each project.
- There should be an investment in human capital, environmental education and training. Universities are ready to participate in environmental education. The CEC should be more active in this area. For example, with regards to the residue from Sierra Blanca, is it realistic to talk about moving radioactive materials as a means to lower risks to human beings?
- How is it possible to have a balance between three countries with such profound imbalances?

(The Interim Executive Director replied by giving the example of the Regional Action Plan on DDT which is different for each country but the overall effect is intended to improve the North American region as a whole.)

- The challenges related to trade and environment are not just geographic. There is a cultural and social dimension. There are very real attitudinal and cultural issues that must be taken into account. For example, in Mexico the mentality is to “use and dispose.” This needs to be addressed.
- The full cost of a “throw-away society” needs to be explored. The cost of disposal has to be built into any analysis.
- Other groups are working on consumption issues. The CEC’s resources are limited and it should not duplicate the work of others, but strive to add value to it.
- The issue of state support of small industries is critical. There must be support for pollution prevention, not just control. It is an issue of capacity building. Marketing support is also required. Small businesses and primary production (peasants, fishermen) are our real economic base. We should also be bringing this to the attention of the Free Trade Commission, not just addressing it within the CEC.
- There is a need to look at issues related to biotechnology, access to genetic resources, biosecurity, genetic pollution and the impacts on food production and farming. Much more information is required in this area. The negotiations for a security protocol failed (Cartagena, Columbia). Great caution is required and the risks are not well understood. However, the CEC is ideally placed to take this on. It is recommended that the CEC host a trinational workshop, in Mexico, on transgenic organisms and that it prepare for this event by assembling information on what already exists. The workshop should help give guidance on where the CEC could best focus its resources and efforts.
- Environmental education has to permeate educational curricula to help provide a new model for living in the next millennium.
- Do not forget industry when establishing linkages related to marine protected areas. Industry in Canada, for example, has developed considerable experience in integrated resource management.
- Sustainable development and children should be a central objective of the Program Plan.
- The role of indigenous peoples in work related to the conservation of biodiversity is not well developed in the work plan although it is identified as an objective. What happened to the workshop on intellectual property rights? This is extremely important to us. People have to become motivated to conserve biodiversity. If communities are not given information and resources, biodiversity will not be protected. Infrastructure support is required.
- Desert and semi-arid ecosystems need to be integrated into the work plan. It is specifically recommended that a strategy to support activities related to the protection of biodiversity in desert and semi-arid areas be developed with a focus on education of indigenous communities.

- We are very concerned about the conflicting paradigms emerging around sustainable tourism. On the one hand this rapidly growing industry is being approached as a market issue. The expanding size of these operations may lead to the destruction of the resource being promoted. On the other hand, benefits to the local communities are usually very limited and the activities risk destroying the social and cultural bases of these communities. The current CEC program should expand its horizons to look at this dilemma and make it central to the project design.

Pollutants and Health

Law and Policy

- It is recommended that an agency be established to train and regulate urban pest control workers.
- It is necessary to reform legislation to permit the introduction of new technology to promote alternative energy production. The present legal framework does not permit these technologies to be developed for use. The CEC could promote instruments for this purpose.
- Within the CEC program there is a need to assess the role of local governments. For example within the automotive industry, internal quality cannot be lower than export quality.
- There is a need to improve environmental education and disseminate information. Children have to be trained early to modify behavior and habits. This is a gap in the CEC's program.
- The Program Plan as it is now elaborated is way beyond the capacity of rural and indigenous communities in Mexico to participate. For example, with regards to plastic, there are no facilities or capability to recycle. It is not just a question of lack of information. There are no facilities and no investment from local authorities or state governments in recycling. State laws are not up to date. As NGOs, we are not getting through to local and state authorities. How can the CEC contribute to this effort?
- Should we be exploring trinational standards for biodegradability?
- Consideration should be given to training political advisors within government agencies to become more sensitive to environmental issues. These people usually survive changes in government. This could be facilitated by the CEC. The Mexican NAC has already begun this effort. (It was noted that this is delicate, as it is not the role of the CEC to interfere in national issues) This can also be undertaken on a trinational basis through the Western Governors Association.
- All of the CEC's program areas have legislative implications. Somehow these should be linked and integrated.
- Methodology for the enforcement of environmental legislation should include information, education and training, environmental legislation and enforcement. It has to be viewed as a whole.
- Innovation should be an overarching concept for law and policy development. The delivery of environmental performance and management has to be kept on a solid economic footing.

There should be a balance with economic realities. Industry (large, medium-size and small) must be seen as a partner.

- The CEC should look at the impacts of privatization of production systems on the health of workers and communities when local plants are turned over to managers from large corporations.
- A new area of study for the CEC should be to look at the export of water imbedded in commodities (i.e., the amount of water it takes to grow tomatoes in Mexico for export). This is leading to water being exported at a cost lower than the cost to consumers of water inside Mexico.
- The concept of natural protected areas is not only about enforcement of regulations and laws. There must also be appropriate policy instruments developed to manage these areas. There should be a trilateral exchange of experience on policy development. For example, methodologies for environmental impact assessment as well as experiences with the important task of assessing social impacts can be exchanged.
- The central vision of the CEC needs to be inverted. The human being should not be the center. Nature should be the center of the vision. Ancient cultures understood this. Nature has to be protected because it has rights. It is not there just to improve the lives of human beings.
- The CEC should concern itself with environmental events it knows are coming and prepare environmental contingency plans for them—for example, future forest fires, future bird deaths, future volcanic eruptions. How can this be contemplated in the CEC's program?
- As individuals and NGOs, we have no way to follow up on how recommendations are being dealt with by the CEC.

The Chair thanked the participants for their rich and varied input and gave his assurance that JPAC would give the information due consideration as it develops its advice to Council and participates in the development of the Program Plan.

Prepared by Lorraine Brooke

APPROVED BY THE JPAC MEMBERS ON 28 APRIL 1999