

Environmental Planning and Assessment Caucus Annual Report for 2008-2009

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General Overview

The EPA Caucus is an active body of more than 70 members from all regions of Canada. The Steering Committee is composed of two co-chairs and 11 members from across the country that are elected at the Caucus' fall meeting. In fall 2007, Gary Schneider, Environmental Coalition of Prince Edward Island, PEI, and Pat Moss, Northwest Institute, BC, were elected as co-chairs.

Financial

The EPA Caucus received core funding in the amount of \$60,000 from the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency. In addition, supplementary funding of \$117,975 was provided for the Caucus' for outreach around the 2010 Review of the Act. Reporting for the 2010 Review contract will be separate from core funding reporting. The financial statement of expenses for the core funding in 2008-2009 is as follows:

Coordination: \$26,500.00
Fall Meeting: \$24,500.00
Administration (15% to RCEN): \$9,000.00
Total expenses: \$60,000.00

Public Education

The Caucus submitted a proposal CEEA (Agency) requesting funding for outreach around the upcoming Seven Year Review of the Act. The proposal was accepted and the Caucus was granted \$117,975 to inform the public about the upcoming review, let them know how they can get involved and provide the tools for effective participation in both the review and the broader environmental assessment process. This was effectively accomplished through public workshops, a communications package and discussion papers designed to help Canadians become prepared to engage in the process.

The EPA Caucus completed a full update and revision of their webpage material on the RCEN website. The web material was updated regularly to include new documents, news and committees produced by the Caucus. This material can be viewed online at:

<http://www.cen-rce.org/eng/caucuses/assessment/index.html>. A new Caucus Google group listserv was created to allow caucus members to post EA-related materials and enable members to store these materials in an archive online. Individual caucus members regularly sent materials about EA issues in their region through the listserv. Additionally, a second Google group listserv was created for communication beyond the EPA Caucus members on issues relating to CEEA (the Act) and its reform.

Members of the EPA Caucus' internal Conference Priorities subcommittee worked in preparation and planning for an upcoming conference on Strategic Environmental Assessment, planned for Jun 18-21, 2009 at Mount Allison University in Sackville, NB.

Organizational Capacity Building

The EPA Caucus holds fall and spring meetings every year. The fall meeting was held in Rustico, PEI, from September 19-21, 2008. Twenty-three delegates from across the country met to discuss the Regulatory Advisory Committee and its subcommittees, strategic plan initiatives, Caucus activities, and to conduct elections.

The spring 2009 meeting was held from March 13-15, 2009 in Ottawa. Twenty-three delegates from across the country attended this meeting. Reporting for the spring meeting will be included with the 2010 Review Contract final report.

Members continued their work on the following six Caucus Committees:

- Conference Priorities
- Public participation
- Strategic EA
- Strategic Legal Actions
- Seven Year Review
- MPMO/Multi-Jurisdictional/Harmonization (New)

The Caucus Steering Committee held conference calls on August 15, 2008, and January 8, 2009, to discuss Caucus activities and make decisions. Additional teleconferences were held with the broader EPA Caucus on January 20th, February 9th, and March 26th, 2009, to discuss news of upcoming changes to CEAA and EA legislation/regulation.

Two Caucus members were able to attend an MPMO information session on December 10, 2008. The information from this meeting was distributed throughout the Caucus to help inform the larger group of the upcoming plans for this newly formed organization.

Effective Government Liaison

The EPA Caucus continued to maintain an excellent working relationship with, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency. Discussions with the Agency at various Caucus meetings have included ways in which the Caucus might work with the Agency to achieve common goals. Material from the Agency, including calls for research proposals and seminar information, are circulated by e-mail to Caucus members.

The EPA Caucus Coordinator and RCEN Executive Director had an in-person meeting with several representatives from the newly formed MPMO on December 11, 2008 to discuss the RCEN delegate selection process and the EPA caucus' interest in participating in and contributing to the future direction of the MPMO with regards to public consultation.

Caucus members continued to be active participants on the Minister of Environment's Regulatory Advisory Committee (RAC) and its subcommittees, attending meetings throughout the year (as they were scheduled). Discussions between the caucus representatives on RAC and

the broader caucus took place regularly on Steering Committee conference calls and by email, as well as at the spring and fall caucus meetings. Note: EPA caucus reps planned a meeting to strategize before the RAC meeting scheduled in February, however, the meeting was cancelled.

Relationship with RCEN

The EPA Caucus has continued to maintain its relationship within the RCEN. Caucus members participated in activities related to the RCEN, including the RCEN AGA, Cross-Caucus teleconferences, and NGO sector consultations. This relationship was also strengthened when the ED of RCEN, Susan Tanner was invited to participate at the spring meeting.

Successes

The EPA Caucus had another very successful year. Meetings were well attended (including new faces) and productive. In addition, new individuals and organizations joined the Caucus. The EPA Caucus successfully completed all the outlined work included in its 2008-09 workplan (Appendix A).

Members responded to EA issues of the day, including the creation of MPMO, responding through media to planned changes to CEAA, and provided EA-related legal advice. The funding provided by the Agency allows communication and interaction between those with an interest in EA across the country. This communication continues to build high-level capacity in areas such as public participation, strategic EA and EA-related legislation.

Challenges

The Caucus continues to be limited by its funds. Core funding from the Agency has not increased in many years.

Members of the Caucus felt that the continuous delays and cancellations related to RAC were frustrating and were barriers to effective communication with the broader NGO community interested in EA in Canada.

Caucus members were concerned that CEAA was unable to attend the EPA Caucus Spring Meeting – an annual meeting held as a forum for discussion between Caucus members and CEAA representatives.