



Legislative Changes Ahead? Commons Committee Calls for Overhaul of Federal Sustainable Development Legislation

By [Charles Birchall](#), Partner and Certified Environmental Law Specialist.
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In a detailed and hard-hitting report released June 17, 2016, the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, said the government's Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (FSDS) "is not living up to expectations."¹ The Strategy, which is updated every three years by Environment and Climate Change Canada, sets out federal environmental priorities, together with goals, targets and implementation strategies across 30 departments and agencies.² The Committee says the FSDS is "more a reporting mechanism for established programs" than a plan for achieving our environmental objectives.³

The Committee says it's time that the *Federal Sustainable Development Act*, enacted in 2008, be updated and expanded "to require the development of an effective federal strategy that will inspire in equal measure environmental, social and economic advancement toward a better future."⁴ It also asked the government to develop measures for improving enforceability and increasing accountability in order to meet sustainable development targets.⁵

Fundamental changes to the Act will be required if Canada is to meet its international commitments, including its climate change commitments, says the Committee.⁶ It recommends that the Act be amended:

- ♦ to require the government to develop a strategy "to lead Canada on a path towards sustainable development" with a thorough consideration of the "three pillars" of sustainable development, namely economic, social and environmental factors⁷
- ♦ to enable a "whole-of-government" approach and comprehensive engagement of all central government agencies in developing and implementing the FSDS and in championing federal sustainable development government-wide⁸

¹ Page 3, Federal Sustainability for Future Generations – A Report Following an Assessment of the *Federal Sustainable Development Act*, a report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development;
http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/HOC/Committee/421/ENVI/Reports/RP8378128/421_ENVI_Rpt02_PD/421_ENVI_Rpt02-e.pdf

² Federal Sustainable Development Strategy website, Environment and Climate Change Canada;
<https://www.ec.gc.ca/dd-sd/default.asp?Lang=En&n=CD30F295-1>

³ Federal Sustainability for Future Generations, page 8

⁴ Ibid, page 26

⁵ Recommendation 10, page 21

⁶ Ibid., page 16

⁷ Recommendation 1, page 8

⁸ Recommendation 2, page 12

- ◆ to base the FSDS on well-accepted sustainable development principles – such as the polluter-pays principle, the limits to the Earth’s ecological capacity, and the need for a low carbon economy/society⁹
- ◆ to require certain federal bodies that do not currently have a departmental sustainable development strategy to do so¹⁰
- ◆ to add specific federal sustainable development goals that reflect Canada’s international commitments, including those made under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change¹¹
- ◆ to include short, medium and long-term targets that are “specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound” (SMART)¹²
- ◆ to ensure that the FSDS is re-assessed and adjusted, as necessary, every two years.¹³

The Committee also made a number of procedural recommendations related to the timing and production of the draft and final FSDSs and biennial progress reports. These documents, together with the reports prepared by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development on the FSDS and departmental strategies, should be tabled with all relevant Parliamentary committees.¹⁴ Finally, the Committee has asked the Government report back within a year on the progress made in implementing all of the recommendations contained in its report.¹⁵

“Everyone can appreciate the importance of taking the steps that are necessary today to improve conditions for people now and in the future,” said Committee Chair Deb Schulte. “The fact that this report is unanimous speaks to the wide support there is for doing things more sustainably.”¹⁶

***Charles (Chuck) J. Birchall, B.A. (Hons.), LL.B., LL.M.**, is a partner at Willms & Shier Environmental Lawyers LLP in Ottawa and a member of the firm’s Northern Team. Chuck has over 25 years of legal experience devoted exclusively to environmental law and is certified as a Specialist in Environmental Law by The Law Society of Upper Canada. Chuck provides advice on a variety of environmental compliance matters, as well as on energy law and Aboriginal consultation issues. Chuck has particular experience advising on environmental assessment issues raised by mining, oil and gas, energy and infrastructure projects. He can be reached at 613-761-2424 or by e-mail at cbirchall@willmsshier.com.*

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⁹ Recommendation 3, page 13

¹⁰ Recommendation 5, page 15

¹¹ Recommendation 6, page 16

¹² Recommendation 7, page 18

¹³ Recommendation 8, page 21

¹⁴ Recommendation 4, page 14, and recommendations 8-9, page 21

¹⁵ Recommendation 13, page 26

¹⁶ “Environment Committee Tables Unanimous Report Urging the Government Towards Greater Sustainability,”

News Release, June 17, 2016, House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development;

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=e&Mode=1&Parl=0&Ses=0&DocId=8377826>