

EGSPA: We can be the Cleanest and Greenest

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1.0 Introduction

The Ecology Action Centre enters into this first review of the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act with the hope that there will be thoughtful and productive discussion between all of us about how we can protect and restore the ecological integrity of our province and enjoy a decent standard of living that is within our means. EGSPA has some lofty language in it, such as 4(1)(a)¹, which elicits scepticism. Yet we are ideally positioned, because of our natural resources and geography, to have one of the cleanest and most sustainable environments **and** economies in the world if we invest in EGSPA and companion measures.

We have provided some opening thoughts about this unique piece of legislation and its implementation over the last five years. With the view that the Act must be regularly reviewed and updated in order to remain relevant we have offered some recommendations including new goals.

2.0 EGSPA Then and Now

The Foundation is Sound

The Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act was constructed on the premise that the “health of the economy, the health of the environment and the health of the people of the Province are interconnected” and that this relationship would only become more obvious in coming decades. This premise remains sound.

The global debt crisis has resulted in a tough business and economic climate, but the underlying reasons for businesses and economies to become more sustainable remain unchanged.

Success

There are 21 environmental goals in EGSPA. In the 2011 Progress Report the Government of Nova Scotia reported that it had implemented 10 goals and made significant progress on others. Ecology Action Centre has applauded the government on meeting goals and challenged them on goals delayed or not met of which there are several. Overall, we consider that EGSPA has advanced sustainability in Nova Scotia and can continue to do so if it emerges from this review reinvigorated and strengthened.

¹ 4(1)(a) demonstrate international leadership by having one of the cleanest and most sustainable environments in the world by the year 2020: and

What's Next?

EGSPA hasn't been and won't be the only vehicle for moving sustainability forward. The Nova Scotia Government has introduced environmental goals and sustainability measures outside of EGSPA, such as the Clean Technology Fund.

EGSPA was passed with all party support and we trust that it will continue to receive a high level of support from all parties and Nova Scotians. We see a reinvigorated Act as a great vehicle for the Nova Scotia Government to move forward both its environmental and economic agenda, in particular jobs here.

The Business Case

There is both an ethical and business case for governments to encourage a transition to a more sustainable economy. The benefits to the environment and human health are well known and do not need to be repeated in this brief. The business case is worth reiterating:

- investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy will continue to increase; between 2010-2035 2/3 of incremental energy demand will be met with renewables and natural gas²
- the environmental goods and service sector is expected to experience average annual growth of between 4.7% and 7.7% over the next 10 years³
- consumer demand for green brands continues to grow⁴
- the demand for eco-certified forest, seafood and agricultural products continues to grow; an opportunity for rural Nova Scotia at a time when demand for high volume, low value products is weakening⁵

As Percy Paris, Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism stated at the launch of Innovacorp's Cleantech competition : "Clean technology is one of the world's fastest growing industries. Knowledge-based companies like those in the clean technology sectors create good jobs and are vital to Nova Scotia's future prosperity". Well said.

Review is Timely

After five years the Act does need to be reviewed, discussed and strengthened.

The Act has been criticized for being light on economic goals. We agree. However, we agree not because we think EGSPA should be a balancing act; every environmental goal balanced by an economic goal. This approach misses the reason or rationale for EGSPA which is that a healthy economy arises from and is sustained by a healthy environment.

² IEA World Energy Outlook, 2011

³ Eco-Canada

⁴ <http://www.cohnwolfe.com/en/ideas-insights/white-papers/green-brands-survey-2011>

⁵ http://www.fsc.org/news.html?&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=1616&cHash=921b9343c

We agree because to some extent the Act fails to follow its own credo: environmental and economic goals are not adequately integrated and mutually supportive. We would like to see the number of economic goals increased and better integrated with the environmental goals. We have attempted to do this with the new goals we are proposing. The main economic goal of ‘improving the province’s economic performance to a level that is equal to or above the Canadian average by the year 2020’ is straightforward but is not integrated with the 21 environmental goals or any environmental goal. Similarly, the economic language of the environmental goals should be strengthened and more explicitly articulated.

Definition of Green Economy or Job

In measuring the economic benefits of EGSPA an industry-wide definition of green jobs would be helpful. There is no widely accepted definition which makes measurement difficult⁶. Eco-Canada is currently conducting a national survey to come up with a definition for a green job or economy.

Limits

In 1972 the Club of Rome published the Limits to Growth. While they were wrong about the dates, they were right about limits. On a finite planet there are limits to growth, at least a growth that comes with an ever-expanding ecological footprint. Recent economic events suggest that the rate of growth for industrialized economies may be slowing. In Nova Scotia we know there are limits to our growth or at least limits to the amount of fish we can catch or trees we can cut down. In the future we may find that growth is more about quality than quantity.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 New Goals

We have suggested nine new goals that are primarily in the areas of energy, natural resources and water. We look forward to hearing about what other goals are being proposed, particularly those which integrate the economy and the environment.

Aquaculture

Increase development of the closed containment finfish aquaculture sector to at least 50% of provincial finfish farming production by 2015.

Nova Scotia is defined by our coasts, yet there is no coastal or marine goal in EGSPA. Until recently, the aquaculture industry in Nova Scotia has largely consisted of sustainable shellfish farming and small-scale land-based closed containment finfish production. The expansion of industrial open net pen finfish farming poses a significant threat to Nova Scotia's coastal ecosystems, leads to increased community conflicts, and puts at risk the existing key provincial economic activities of fisheries and tourism. To be on the leading edge in a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive global seafood market requires innovation, adaptation, and a willingness to take actions that can differentiate a region from its

⁶ http://csis.org/files/publication/100217_GreenJobs.pdf

competitors. Increasing investment and development of closed containment aquaculture offers the advantages of raising fish in a controlled environment with optimal growth rates and continuous production capabilities, the highest production per unit area and per unit worker of any aquaculture system, and the provision for clean harbours and bays through environmentally safe waste management treatment.

Coastal Act

Introduce a Coastal Act by 2015 that covers all activities taking place in the coastal zone, and which includes targets for coastal land conservation, and consistent province-wide coastal development standards.

A Coastal Act is an investment in protecting Nova Scotia's coastal ecosystems, coastal communities and maritime economy. The annual cost of repairing damaged coastal infrastructure, such as roads, harbours and wharves, and houses is rising due to climate change impacts. The most cost effective option to reduce storm and flood damage is to put in place consistent regulations about where you can build and what kinds of activities are suitable in the coastal zone. The ongoing provincial coastal strategy is a step in the right direction, but without clear regulations and accountability it will fail to achieve any real gains in stopping the death by a thousand cuts that is causing rampant ecosystem loss and degradation and higher risks of erosion and flood damage in the coastal zone. Legislation is necessary to ensure accountability and enforcement, and to create a provincial lead for coastal matters.

Water Act

Establish a Water Act by 2015.

Nova Scotia needs a Water Act as the provincial Environment Act does not adequately protect our freshwater resources. A Water Act should include transparent and accountable governance arrangements, the ability to impose licensing conditions for water use and discharge, and mechanisms for the effective designation of priority areas where additional management will be required. The cost of not protecting our water is high. Water damage now accounts for \$1.7 billion in insurance claims per year and has surpassed fire as the largest cost to Canada's insurance industry. A Water Act will also help improve water efficiency which results in significant cost savings for individuals and businesses. For example, a reduction in Ontario's water demand of 10% in 10 years using only cost-effective measures would save 121 million cubic metres a year and save \$500 million dollars in avoided infrastructure costs. This province needs to take advantage of the economic opportunity that the water industry provides. The size of the global water industry is estimated at US\$360 billion and is forecasted to rise to US\$1.6 trillion in 10 years. Canada's most experienced funder of water organizations, the nation's leading water research network and Canada's largest bank understand these economic risks and opportunities. The three have recently joined forces to make a clear case for the critical role water plays in Canada's economy.⁷

⁷ To learn more about the Blue Economy Initiative visit <http://www.blue-economy.ca>

Energy Efficiency

Mandate the Utilities and Review Board and Efficiency Nova Scotia to develop plans to target all energy efficiency improvements that are cost-effectively achievable, for all fuel types.

Energy efficiency helps the environment and the economy by cutting pollution and saving money. Efficiency programs help Nova Scotian residents and businesses cut their energy bills. Our entire economy also reaps economic savings by operating efficiency programs instead of building new power plants or spending our income on fossil fuels in our electricity sector or for home-heating. This goal would mandate that Efficiency Nova Scotia and its regulator develop plans that aim to maximize the benefits to the environment and economy by targeting all efficiency improvements that can cost-effectively be achieved.

Land-Use Planning

Increase density and revive town centres in already built-up areas by placing growth boundaries on all communities within Nova Scotia by 2020.

Requiring growth boundaries does not restrict development – it merely directs growth to areas that are most appropriate. This direction conforms with the Provincial Statements of Interest laid out in the Municipal Government Act, which state that Nova Scotia's land and water resources are fundamental to our physical, social and economic well-being.⁸ Reasons for densifying our neighbourhoods include protecting wildlife habitat, maintaining land for eco-servicing, preserving natural resource land, respecting heritage areas and scenic vistas, and providing recreational opportunities. Dense neighbourhoods provide opportunities for residents to be more active and healthy – to walk to the grocery store, to work, and to visit friends and family. Adherence to the growth boundaries for communities will help revitalize town centres and ease the call for transit services in rural communities. Affordable housing strategies must be developed to ensure there is enough reasonably priced land for development.

Protect Farmland

Implement the recommendations of the 2010 report Preservation of Agricultural Land in Nova Scotia by 2014

In their report to the Nova Scotia Government on Preservation of Agricultural Land in Nova Scotia, Williams et al (2010) make a number of excellent recommendations to support the economic and ecological prosperity of agriculture in this province. Each recommendation is accompanied by practical, achievable suggestions for implementation. The EAC particularly supports recommendations 4.1.3, 4.4.1, 4.4.3, and 4.5.1.⁹ Ensuring a viable agricultural sector in Nova Scotia would have significant

⁸ Government of Nova Scotia (1998) Municipal Government Act Schedule B: Statements of Provincial Interest. Retrieved from <http://nslegislature.ca/legc/statutes/muncpgov.htm> on December 13, 2011.

⁹ To read the report go to <http://www.gov.ns.ca/agri/elibrary/NSALRC-rpt.pdf>

economic benefits. Increasing Nova Scotian farmers' share of the food dollar from 13% to 20% would create thousands of jobs in rural Nova Scotia.¹⁰

Local Food Production

Establish a clear partnership between government, consumers and consumer groups, and farmers to work towards a goal of 20% of the food dollar to be spent on local food by 2020 and to measure the progress toward the goal on an annual basis.

While recognizing that government cannot legislate consumer spending habits, it can foster an environment where local food production is profitable and its consumption is encouraged. EGSPA envisions citizens of the province participating in making the environmental goals a reality, and therefore, the government should work with citizens to reach goals that will benefit our economy, our health, and our communities. This commitment and partnership to achieving 20% local food consumption would require government action including increasing support for Select Nova Scotia, establishing a labeling scheme that indicates products produced in the province, and prioritizing local procurement.

Reduce Clearcutting

Reduce the proportion of wood harvested by clearcutting to no more than 50% of all harvests by 2016.

This goal has already been announced as government policy¹¹, however, the commitment could be strengthened if it were adopted as a legislated goal through EGSPA. It is crucial to ensure an ecologically meaningful definition of a clearcut to strengthen the impact this goal will have on the ecological health of the forests of Nova Scotia and the future prosperity of the forest industry. We endorse the definition submitted to government on October 6, 2010 by the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association, the Federation of Nova Scotia Woodland Owners and EAC.

Silviculture

Fifty percent of the annual silviculture budget will be allocated to the Category 7 Uneven-age, Quality-Improvement Silviculture Program by 2016.

Uneven-aged management helps build a more resilient, ecologically-appropriate forest. A greater emphasis on uneven-aged, quality improvement silviculture will support the government's commitment to reducing clearcutting by providing funding for alternative harvesting methods. Following through on the commitment to reduce clearcutting will help ensure steady employment in green industries for rural Nova Scotians. Quality improvement silviculture can create up to 50% more jobs than clearcutting.

¹⁰In 2010 the Ecology Action Centre and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture released a report on food miles in Nova Scotia- http://nsfa-fane.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/FM-July4-_final_long_report.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.gov.ns.ca/news/details.asp?id=20101201001>

3.2 Other Recommendations

Make Mandatory Labeling Mandatory (Again)

When we buy a car, stove or fridge the manufacturer is required to tell us how much energy it uses so we can make comparisons with similar products. When we buy a house, the single biggest purchase most of us will make, there is no requirement for the manufacturer to provide an energy use rating. The goal below made EnerGuide rating of new homes mandatory. Unfortunately, in 2008 the Government made labeling of new homes voluntary once again. We would urge this government to reinstate this goal. By doing so the Government would encourage competition and innovation in the new housing market and Nova Scotians would reap economic savings.

(r) all new residential dwelling units constructed in the Province that are within the scope of Part 9 of the National Building Code of Canada will be required to display an EnerGuide rating by the year 2008;

Include MASH Sector in Procurement

The Sustainable Procurement Policy should extend to the Municipal, Academic, Schools and Hospitals (MASH) sector. The Nova Scotia Government should continue to work with MASH sector to make sure this happens.

Green Jobs Labour Market Strategy

The Nova Scotia Government and Nova Scotian learning institutions have invested in training and education for the green economy. Currently there appears to be no comprehensive or coordinated approach or Green Jobs Labour Market Strategy. A coordinated approach to the Green Jobs Labour market would help to ensure that Nova Scotians are trained for the emerging economy and that we can minimize the number of workers we need to bring in from other provinces.

Study of Economic Impact of EGSPA (and other green economy measures)

There has been debate but no study of the economic costs and benefits of meeting the 21 EGSPA goals (or other green economic measures in Nova Scotia). We would encourage the Government to select several EGSPA goals and evaluate them.

A straight cost-benefit analysis could be done but we would encourage a full cost accounting such that there is a full accounting of all social and environmental costs and benefits. This includes the future costs of ecological destruction and climate change as well as benefits associated with indicators related to, for example, human health, food security and ecological improvements. Nova Scotia's own Genuine Progress Index is a leading organization in the incorporation of these costs and benefits.

In addition to full cost accounting, we might suggest outlining a scenario-based vision of a future economy based on sustainable prosperity, and then back-cast to consider the investments that will be required to move towards this vision. Nova Scotians can contrast this vision with those that fail to move us towards sustainable prosperity. Such an analysis will highlight the risks of lock-in within particularly undesirable economic trajectories.

4.0 Conclusion

The Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act is an Act with a lot of potential both of because of what is in the Act and what could be in the Act. Whole sections, ie. section 5, 7 or 8 have received little attention or use. As a result of the review we hope that the government, opposition parties, businesses, citizens, First Nations, municipal governments, community groups, unions and many more will make it their own. We can be one of the cleanest and greenest economies in the world, if we want to.