

# Principles of Sustainable Development

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A set of guiding principles submitted to the Task Force on Land Use for  
use in the development of a comprehensive provincial land use policy

Environmental  
Advisory  
Council

## Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development

### Background

The Report of the Commission on Land and Local Governance<sup>1</sup> recommended that provincial land use policies and a conservation strategy be developed using sustainable development principles. Any land use policies that are developed will guide planning and development decisions province-wide, shaping what Prince Edward Island will look like well into the future.

The Land Use Policy Task Force was formed to lead a public dialogue on provincial land policies and is undertaking a wide-ranging review of land practices in the province. To assist in the discussion, the Environmental Advisory Council prepared the foundation document '*PEI: Planning for a Sustainable Future - A Time For Questions*'<sup>2</sup> launched in August 2012.

To help inform the Land Use Policy Task Force in the development of new provincial land use policies, the Environmental Advisory Council has identified a set of **guiding principles** to direct decision-making, protection and sustainable development of our land and resources. These guiding principles have been developed following consultation with key stakeholders across the Island.

### Sustainable development

A healthy environment is critical to every aspect of life in Prince Edward Island. It provides us with our basic needs - clean air, clean water, food and a place to live and work. It gives us a place for recreation. It is the source of the raw materials we use. It maintains our health, and it supports a range of economic activities.

The **sustainable development** of our environment is a way to enhance the long term economic, social and environmental wellbeing of people and communities by:

- promoting social justice and equality of opportunity; and
- enhancing the natural and cultural environment.

### Our principles for sustainable development

When we focus on the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development, we are looking at the:

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<sup>1</sup> New Foundations (2009) December <http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/ReportEng.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/susfuture.pdf>



- issues that either help or hinder the process of improving people's quality of life;
- system that determine how we use and distribute the resources needed to improve peoples' lives, and
- renewable and non-renewable natural resources that make up our surroundings and help sustain and improve our lives.

The creation of a healthy environment and 'good' quality of life requires the integration of strategies that address sustainability and equity with economic and social concerns.

### **Our environment**

A healthy, appealing environment plays a key role in maintaining our economic prosperity and attracting and retaining people to live and work in this Province. However, as our natural environment changes and adapts to the challenge of human activity, the natural systems that support us are put under increasing pressure.

Conserving the natural systems that safeguard our lives and our livelihood is sensible practice. Environmental problems like water pollution, negatively impact our health. But attractive, clean, natural outdoor spaces and scenery make us feel good and can improve our health and wellbeing when we use them for sport and active recreation.

Delivering on the commitment to provide an environmentally secure Prince Edward Island, now and into the future, will require actions that protect our natural capital, support biodiversity, promote local economies and help to minimize waste generation, energy usage and transport demands.

Government must be committed to developing a sustainable, diverse, competitive, high value added economy, with high quality skills and education that minimizes demands on the environment.

Any Environment strategy must involve a co-ordinated and continuous effort to:

- improve the health and wealth of our natural habitat,
- conserve the diversity of our Island land- and seascapes, and
- protect the communities that contribute to our economic success.

If government wants its environmental policy to succeed, it needs to look at environmental issues from a:



- scientific,
- moral,
- ethical,
- cultural,
- behavioural,
- economic,
- historical and
- health perspective.

Furthermore it must develop a consultation process that respects these elements.

### **Challenges and opportunities**

If we are to develop a sustainable future for Prince Edward Island we need to carefully manage the pressures we place on our environment. While activities such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry, small industry, transport, and construction and development are extremely important to our economy, they can, under certain circumstances, adversely affect our environment.

Distinct challenges facing our local environment include, among others; loss of biodiversity; ecosystem degradation; unsustainable resource use; climate change and loss of traditional landscapes and heritage.

Putting sustainable development into practice means ensuring that economic and social policies deliver both environmental protections and enhanced economic and social wellbeing by:

- building a sustainable economy
- improving quality of life
- conserving and enhancing the environment and
- protecting our land- and seascape

While it may not always be possible to ensure that one priority for action does not conflict with another, Government must do its utmost to address problem issues directly and openly. In all cases its decisions should be guided by the principles of sustainable development outlined in this document.



## Guiding Principles

### 1 Translating any vision into action requires changing the way we work so that:

- a. sustainable development is the core principle underpinning the decision making process
- b. critical issues are identified through discussion with key stakeholders;
- c. people and communities are at the centre of sustainable development planning;
- d. policies and programmes are integrated so that they are mutually reinforcing;
- e. funding and grant schemes compliment policy design and planning objectives;
- f. spending plans and budget agendas are aimed at achieving key sustainable development outcomes with realistic planning horizons;
- g. short term decisions are not contradictory to long-term objectives;
- h. the needs and opportunities of all parts of Prince Edward Island are identified;
- i. the root causes and consequences of problems are addressed and the risks of inaction are recognized;
- j. successful examples of sustainable development are made mainstream as soon as possible;
- k. sustainable development is integrated into education and training programmes, and
- l. public understanding and awareness of the meaning of sustainable development and its day-to-day implications is increased.

### 2 Government must be committed to safeguarding the interests of this and future generations by:

- a. placing people, their health and their quality of life at the centre of its concern;
- b. recognizing that a healthy and resilient environment is fundamental to maintaining a

- healthy and resilient population;
- c. ensuring that the environment is neither irreversibly damaged nor environmental resources irrecoverably depleted;
  - d. applying cost-effective measures to prevent potentially serious environmental damage from occurring, even in the presence of scientific uncertainty about the seriousness of the potential risk;
  - e. ensuring all citizens of Prince Edward Island have access to relevant information, can see how decisions are made and can take part in the decision-making process;
  - f. developing long-term planning horizons which recognize future challenges and opportunities;
  - g. using mainstream scientific knowledge to assist in decision-making, and identifying potential knowledge gaps which will be need to be researched;
  - h. taking account of the risks and the uncertainties of inaction by applying the precautionary principle;
  - i. incorporating the full range of costs and benefits when making plans and decisions, including those which cannot easily be valued in money terms, and
  - j. working to prevent pollution as far as possible, and making the polluter remedy the damage done by their pollution



## APPENDIX

## Glossary

**Biodiversity** - is the degree of variation of life forms within a given species, ecosystem, biome, or an entire planet.

**Biome** - a major biological community, such as a grassland or desert, characterized chiefly by the dominant forms of plant and animal species and the prevailing climate.

**Cost-benefit analysis** - Cost–benefit analysis is often used by governments and private sector businesses, to evaluate the desirability of a given policy. It is an analysis of the expected balance of benefits versus costs.

**Ecosystem** - a community of living organisms interacting with its physical environment and together functioning as a unit.

**Environment (Natural)** - comprises all living and non-living things occurring naturally on Earth. The concept of the natural environment can be distinguished by its components which come together to form natural systems that are free from human interference. It can include all vegetation, soil, rocks, atmosphere, and natural phenomena that occur within its boundaries.

The natural environment is distinct from the built environment, which comprises the areas and components that are strongly influenced by humans. A geographical area is regarded as a natural environment.

**Environment (Social)** - comprises the social, economic and cultural forces that shape the life of a person or a population.

**Habitat** - a: the place or environment where a plant or animal normally lives and grows. b: the typical place of residence of a person or a group of people.

**Landscape/seascape** - comprises the visible features of an area of land or sea including the physical elements of landforms such as mountains, hills, water bodies such as rivers, lakes, ponds, coastlines, harbours, and the sea, living elements of land cover including vegetation, human elements including different forms of land use, buildings and structures, and transitional features such as lighting, cloud forms and weather conditions.

**Natural capital** - is a concept that describes the sum of all the essentials for life that Nature provides for humankind. These include clean air and water; the ability to produce and gather



food, fuel and raw materials from the land and sea; the regulation of our climate; flood protection; the prevention of soil erosion; the recycling of wastes and the filtration of pollution. It also provides us with the personal benefits that are derived from enjoying an increase in our health and happiness.

**Non-renewable resource** - is a natural resource which cannot be generated, replaced, or used on a scale which can sustain its rate of consumption; once exhausted there will be no more available for future use.

**Planning horizon** - is the length of time an organization will plan into the future to achieve a set of goals.

**Policy** - a set of basic principles and associated guidelines, formulated and enforced by an organization, to direct its actions in the pursuit of short, medium or long-term goals.

**Polluter pays principle** - according to which the polluter should bear the cost of those measures used to remedy pollution determined by the extent to which the damage done exceeds an acceptable level (standard) of pollution.

**Precautionary principle** - where a threat of serious or irreversible damage to the environment is possible, but in the lack of full scientific certainty, that lack of certainty will not be used as a reason for postponing the use of cost-effective measures to prevent possible environmental degradation.

**Renewable resource** - is a natural resource which can replenish itself with the passage of time, either through biological reproduction or some other naturally recurring process.

**Resilience (Environment)** - is the ability of an ecosystem to respond to a perturbation or disturbance by resisting damage and recovering quickly.

**Social justice** - a set of universally agreed upon principles which guide people and organizations in judging what is ethical and equitable for personal and social development in matters relating to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

**Sustainable development** - is a form of human development in which resource use aims to meet the human needs "..... of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

**Quality of life** - refers to the general health and wellbeing of individuals and societies. The term is used in a wide range of contexts, including healthcare, and politics. Usual indicators of the





quality of life include not only wealth and employment, but also the built environment, physical and mental health, happiness, feeling of security, education, recreation and leisure time, and social belonging. Quality of life should not be confused with the standard of living, which is based primarily on income.

**Wellbeing** - is a general term used to describe the condition of an individual or group of individuals, in terms of their social, economic, psychological, spiritual or medical state.

