

# CEAA Registry Internet Site:



*Providing for more  
meaningful public  
participation*

**IAIA**  
**April 2004**



# CEAA Registry Internet Site:

## Providing for more meaningful public participation

### *Introduction*

On October 30, 2003, amendments to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* established a new Registry Internet Site that provides for timely notification to the public of when environmental assessments are initiated and includes key records related to the assessment with contacts for how additional information can be obtained. This paper provides an overview of the policy context and the development challenges involved in the establishment of the new Registry Internet Site, and will describe some of the key results that the site has had in promoting more meaningful public participation in environmental assessment. As a conclusion, the paper will identify some future opportunities for improving the usefulness of the Registry Internet Site in promoting public participation.

### *The importance of public participation*

During the recent legislative review of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, the importance of public participation in the environmental assessment process emerged as a key theme. In the preliminary research conducted in preparation for legislative review, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency identified public participation in the assessment process as a priority area for discussion, and subsequent national consultations confirmed the need to improve upon public involvement in environmental assessments.

One particular area identified for improvement was the use of the public registry of documents related to an environmental assessment in promoting public participation. A consistent message coming out of the national consultations was that while having convenient public access to environmental assessment records was important, the greatest difficulty for the public was in knowing when federal environmental assessments were being conducted. At the time, the Agency did maintain an on-line Federal Environmental Assessment Index, but this Index was criticized because the information provided was viewed as insufficient and often difficult to understand. Most importantly, because use of the Index by departments was not legally required, assessments were often entered on the site too late in the assessment process for the public to become involved in them.

Following these national consultations, the Minister of the Environment set promoting more meaningful public participation as one of the three goals for the legislative review, and specifically identified the creation of a new Registry Internet Site as the main action to meet this goal. In his report to Parliament on the legislative review, the Minister stressed the importance of public participation in the environmental assessment process:





*Through meaningful public participation, all interested persons and organizations have a fair opportunity to contribute and to see how their contributions have been used. Proponents and government decision makers are provided with better information about possible environmental effects and can better address public concerns and priorities. Final decisions can better reflect community values. Effective public participation also can build greater public trust, confidence and acceptability in the environmental assessment process and in the decisions that come out of that process.*

Minister of the Environment, Report to Parliament, 2001

The importance of strengthening public participation in the environmental assessment process, and the ability of an on-line Registry to help meet this goal became further promoted through Parliament's deliberations on the amendments to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*. Parliamentarians focused on improving the ability of the Registry Internet Site to notify the public of environmental assessments and to provide more information to assist in participating in the process.

### ***Government-on-Line***

In addition to the specific interests in using Internet based solutions to promote public participation in the environmental assessment process, the Government of Canada has also been promoting the use of the Internet in general to promote service delivery to Canadians through the Government-on-Line initiative.

Over the past decade it has become increasingly apparent that Canadians are using the Internet and expect to be able to interact with their Government through this means. Over two thirds of Canadians now have Internet access and the vast majority of Canadians see on-line service delivery as an important part of Government services.

Government-on-Line not only responds to the growing use of the Internet in Canadian society, but also promotes the Internet as a solution to the difficulties in providing government services across a country as vast as Canada. As part of Government-on-Line, services are not only increasingly provided through the Internet, but connectivity is also promoted throughout the remote areas of Canada through investments in broadband infrastructure so as to facilitate providing a more equal level of service to all Canadians.





- 77% of Canadians think Internet will improve services from the Government of Canada
- 73% believe putting services and information on-line is a good use of tax dollars
- 78% believe Government-on-Line makes government more innovative
- 77% believe Government-on-Line will improve how Canadians interact with Government

(Listening to Canadians, 2001)

The benefits of providing on-line services to remote areas of Canada were equally relevant for environmental assessment. Through the use of the Internet, not only would citizens across Canada be notified of assessments no matter where they occurred, but also citizens in remote areas could obtain real time information of assessments being conducted, even when more traditional means of communication proved difficult.

### ***Registry Internet Site – Legal framework***

In order to meet the Government of Canada's commitments for Government-on-Line and to address many of the identified short-comings in promoting public participation in the environmental assessment process, amendments were made to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* to establish a new Registry Internet Site. Brought into force on October 30, 2003, these amendments require that the Agency establish and maintain a Registry Internet Site and that federal authorities input into this site for every environmental assessment conducted under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*.

The Registry Internet Site's primary purpose is to act as a notification tool and requires the posting of basic information relevant to the assessment. For those interested in more information, contacts are provided for how copies of the key documents may be obtained.

During its deliberations on the legislative review, Parliament further enhanced the ability of the Registry Internet Site to provide opportunities for public involvement in environmental assessments. For example, Parliament increased the amount of





information contained on the Registry Internet Site, and instituted minimum periods of notification for all environmental assessments.

Information contained in the Registry Internet Site for all assessments:

- A notice of commencement, posted on the site within fourteen days of the start of the environmental assessment
- A description of the scope of the project
- The environmental assessment report, or how a copy may be obtained
- Any notices requesting public comments on the assessment
- In cases where there are public consultations, the description of the scope of factors to be assessed, or how a copy of this document may be obtained
- The environmental assessment decision (not to be taken until at least fifteen days after the Notice of Commencement is posted)
- Information on any follow-up programs
- Any other information deemed appropriate

The political desire to use the Internet as a tool to promote public participation was made clear, and with the proclamation of amendments to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, the Registry Internet Site became a cornerstone for the federal environmental assessment process in Canada.

### ***Registry Internet Site - Development Challenges***

During the development of the legal framework for the Registry Internet Site, it was recognized that there would be many challenges facing the development of the Site and that any solution would need to be effective and credible while remaining flexible enough to accommodate the particular circumstances of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*.

First, because the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* process is based on the principle of self-assessment, entries on the Registry Internet Site would be inputted by over thirty different federal organizations based across Canada. In addition, during 2002-





2003 approximately 6,700 assessments were conducted under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, ranging from small routine screenings to more rigorous and lengthy panel reviews. Any approach to designing the Registry Internet Site would have to minimize the workload requirements placed upon different users for the more routine assessments that are of less interest to the public, while maintaining the capacity to put more information on the site so as to meet public expectations for higher profile and more rigorous assessments.

The second challenge facing development was the need to meet the Government of Canada's commitments under the *Official Languages Act*. Under this legislation, the Government of Canada is required to provide specific services in both of Canada's official languages. In particular, as required by this legislation, all information on a Government web-site must be provided in both French and English. For the Registry Internet Site, this meant that innovative approaches needed to be developed to minimize translation requirements for routine assessments in order to avoid delays in the process and to allow departments to focus resources on more appropriate assessments.

The third challenge facing the development of the Registry Internet Site was to establish relationships with the information databases that already existed in other departments. Some departments, as part of their regulatory processes were already tracking information on their environmental assessments within the context of broader regulatory processes. For the user, there was a concern that putting in place new requirements to input into a Registry Internet Site would double the inputting required of field staff. It became clear that while it was of primary importance to ensure that the Registry Internet Site would be able to meet the requirements of the amended *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, it would be important for the Agency to work with appropriate departments at developing mechanisms to streamline the workload associated with meeting the information requirements of various systems.

### ***Registry Internet Site - Design Approach***

In meeting these challenges the Agency needed to develop an approach to the Registry Internet Site that would minimize the workload required to input information into the system for the more routine assessments and, in turn, minimize translation requirements. However, for those assessments that were of more interest to the public there had to remain the flexibility to include more information on the Internet Site in order to provide the added value of additional information when it was appropriate to dedicate the necessary resources to do so.

In developing this flexibility, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency produced standardized forms that could be used to complete the key documents required on the Registry Internet Site for all assessments. Through this approach, organizations could use pick-lists to enter almost all of the information requirements and then this information would be inputted automatically into standardized notices that would generate a Notice of Commencement, notices on how to obtain key reports, and decision







documents. In addition to reducing workload and dramatically reducing translation requirements, this approach also allowed the Registry Internet Site to capture standardized data for all environmental assessments and to generate reports on this information to see if the Registry Internet Site was being used appropriately.

While the use of these forms and standardized templates was useful for the routine notices, the Registry Internet Site was also developed so that entire reports could be saved easily into the system, as long as they were provided in both French and English. This flexibility has allowed users to input entire environmental assessment reports, notices requesting public input, or any other relevant documentation directly on the Internet Site and has allowed for the public to obtain this information more easily.

Addressing the linkages between the Registry Internet Site and other databases has been a major challenge for development. Using modern practices for programming, the Registry Internet Site has been developed so as to allow for Business-to-Business solutions where users can input into departmental systems and these systems will in turn update the Registry Internet Site. This approach is being piloted with Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Habitat Referral Tracking System and will allow for users to input into a single system that tracks information from the project referral stage through the environmental assessment and on into the permitting process. In addition to reducing workload and promoting consistency in information, the Business-to-Business approach has also allowed Fisheries and Oceans Canada to better monitor the administration of its own services while meeting the requirements of the Registry Internet Site.

### ***Design Approach: Public Searches***

One of the main criticisms of the previous Federal Environmental Assessment Index was not related to what information was contained on the site but rather the fact that it was difficult to find the information that the public was looking for. In developing the new Registry Internet Site, a primary deliverable became to develop a user-friendly site that allowed for the public to easily find the information they needed on environmental assessments that would be of interest to them.

In developing public searches, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency recognized the different types of users of the Registry Internet Site. For advanced users looking for specific projects or who were searching for environmental assessments by themes, the Site provided basic and advanced searches using key words, dates or specific information fields such as environmental assessments conducted by a specific organization, or environmental assessments related to hydro-electricity.

For the general public, it was recognized that the site should promote those environmental assessments where the Government of Canada is requesting public participation in the assessment. For these assessments, a quick list of projects out for public comment was provided on the main search page.





Finally, it was recognized that for many members of the public who do not have an advanced understanding of the environmental assessment system in Canada, the main area of interest would be to find out what assessments are occurring in their community. To promote this geographic search, the Registry Internet Site tracks the latitude and longitude of each environmental assessment and then portrays this information against a basic map of Canada with provincial and territorial break downs. These map searches are also able to take advantage of advanced searching abilities so that results can be rendered on these maps for environmental assessments that meet specific criteria, such as all environmental assessments in the agricultural sector where follow-up programs have been implemented. This mapping function of the Registry Internet Site has been a key deliverable in providing for a user-friendly site that allows the public to easily determine what environmental assessments may be of interest.

Copies of these search pages can be seen in pages 11, 12, and 13 of this paper.

### ***Results since October 30, 2003***

In meeting the obligations set forth by amendments to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, the Registry Internet Site meets the objective of promoting more meaningful public participation in environmental assessments while still providing a flexible system that minimizes workload requirements where possible.

Since the Registry Internet Site was established on October 30, 2003, over one thousand five hundred environmental assessments have been registered by over thirty four different organizations from across Canada.

In addition, on-line public consultations have been conducted for construction projects in Banff National Park and for the development of several class screening reports for projects occurring across Canada. For these consultations, extensive documentation was translated and provided directly on-line, allowing for the public to easily access the documents needed to participate effectively in the assessment.

In addition to the more routine use of the Registry Internet Site, some departments have begun proactively promoting the site to stakeholders to promote engagement in the process and to provide for greater transparency in their environmental assessment practices. One example of this has been the Canada Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board who has promoted the site to community stakeholders as a means of keeping track of the Board's activities in the Nova Scotia Offshore. Because of the mapping abilities of the Registry Internet Site, these affected communities are now able to visually identify where in the offshore the Board is conducting environmental assessments. This has in turn promoted a greater level of trust with stakeholders and has greatly enhanced the ability of these affected communities to identify environmental assessments they are interested in and to become involved early on in the process.







### ***Additional Benefits: Information Tracking and Quality Assurance***

The purpose of establishing the Registry Internet Site was to promote more meaningful public participation in the environmental assessment process. However, in the process of using forms and standardized templates to generate routine automated notices and to reduce workload, the Registry Internet Site has also become a valuable source of information on the federal environmental assessment process.

Standardized information fields has allowed for the Agency to generate reports on how federal environmental assessments are being conducted and this has greatly improved the ability of the Agency to identify implementation issues such as federal coordination, the timeliness associated with environmental assessments, when and how public consultations are being conducted, and to what extent follow-up programs are being used in environmental assessments.

At this stage, these reporting abilities have been critical in addressing implementation issues associated with the recent amendments to the Act. However, as the sophistication of these reports improves it is expected that this will become the main source of information for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency's new Quality Assurance Program that will monitor performance and promote better quality assessments across the federal government.

### ***Future Challenges***

In developing the Registry Internet Site, the focus to date has been to meet the legal requirements set by Parliament. This has resulted in dramatic improvements in the Government's ability to notify the public in a timely way of environmental assessments and to provide the necessary information to help the public become involved.

Although the Registry Internet Site has only been in operation for six months, new areas for improvement are already being identified that could greatly advance the ability of the public to use on-line services to improve their ability to participate in environmental assessments.

The first will be to expand the ability of the site so that information is not only sent from the government to the public, but also to allow the public to post comments for specific environmental assessments directly on-line. This format for on-line consultation was already used during public consultations for the legislative review where the public was able to post and review comments directly on the Agency's web-site. In the longer term, the challenge will be to see whether this approach can be extended to higher profile projects where the public can post and view documents directly on the Internet Site.

A second future area of improvement is to better coordinate information across the various environmental assessment jurisdictions in Canada. The Registry Internet Site has gone a long way in making it easier for the public to find information on environmental





assessments being conducted under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, but it is still difficult for the public to know which level of government is involved in a given project and how to find the appropriate information. The Government of Canada's commitment to Government-on-Line sets a goal of providing single window service to the public across the different levels of government, and this approach would be especially useful for environmental assessments. At a basic level this could entail simple links to the different web-based information sources available for environmental assessments in Canada, but in the longer term there would be a definite advantage to developing a search engine capable of retrieving environmental assessment information across the different environmental assessment jurisdictions operating in Canada.

The third area for future development will be to further advance the sophistication of the mapping abilities of the Registry Internet Site. Because every environmental assessment entry is now attached to latitude and longitude coordinates, there may be an ability in the longer term to overlay environmental assessment information with other map based information such as basic topographical data or even inventories of Species at Risk habitat. There are several challenges facing this type of interaction of data, but there could be significant benefits to the practice of environmental assessment.





|                     |                  |                    |        |             |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------|-------------|
| Français            | Contact Us       | Help               | Search | Canada Site |
| Home                | About the Agency | Media Room         | Links  | Site Map    |
| Search the Registry |                  | About the Registry |        |             |

Environmental  
Assessments

Public Participation

How to do  
Environmental  
Assessments

Legislation &  
Regulations

Training  
Opportunities

Research &  
Development

Strategic  
Environmental  
Assessment

Publications

Frequently Asked  
Questions

Canadian  
Environmental  
Assessment  
Registry

[CEAR Main »](#)

*A primer for  
Industry*

Will your project need  
a federal EA? [More »](#)

[Search our site](#)

## Canadian Environmental Assessment Registry

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Registry contains information about projects undergoing environmental assessment across Canada. Use the search tool below to find specific projects, or find more [about the registry](#).

### Search the Registry

Keyword(s)

Province / Territory

Active Within Date Range:



To



(yyyy-mm-dd)

☐ New (posted in the last 7 days)

[» Search](#)

[Advanced Search](#)

[Search Outside of Canada](#)

[» Pre-November 2003 Search](#)

### Out for Public Comments

Class screenings  
currently out for public  
comments

[Land-based  
Commercial Guiding  
Activities in the  
Mountain National  
Parks of Canada](#)

[Special Events in the  
Halifax Defence  
Complex](#)

### Class Screenings

[Browse all class  
screenings here.](#)

### Geographic View

To locate active environmental assessments regionally, select a province or territory from the map below, or select View all of Canada.

[» View all of Canada.](#)





|                     |                  |                    |        |             |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------|-------------|
| Français            | Contact Us       | Help               | Search | Canada Site |
| Home                | About the Agency | Media Room         | Links  | Site Map    |
| Search the Registry |                  | About the Registry |        |             |

- Environmental Assessments
- Public Participation
- How to do Environmental Assessments
- Legislation & Regulations
- Training Opportunities
- Research & Development
- Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Publications
- Frequently Asked Questions

Canadian  
Environmental  
Assessment  
Registry  
[CEAR Main »](#)

*A primer for  
Industry*

Will your project need  
a federal EA? [More »](#)

[Search our site](#)

[CEAR Home](#) » [Advanced Search](#)

## Canadian Environmental Assessment Registry

- » Use one or more of the following fields to conduct an advanced search for an environmental assessment.
- » [Search outside of Canada.](#)

### Advanced Search

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Keyword(s)   |  |
| CEA Registry Reference Number                            |  |
| Status   | <input type="text"/>                         |
| Department / Agency                                      | <input type="text"/>                         |
| Province / Territory                                     | <input type="text"/>                         |
| National Park  | <input type="text"/>                         |
| Ecozone  | <input type="text"/>                         |
| Drainage Region  | <input type="text"/>                         |
| Project Descriptor                                       | <input type="text"/>                         |
| Trigger (Reason for Involvement)                         | <input type="text"/>                         |
| Assessment Type  | <input type="text"/>                         |
| Active Within Date Range                                 | <input type="text"/> To <input type="text"/> |
| (yyyy-mm-dd)   |  |
| Posted Within Date Range                                 | <input type="text"/> To <input type="text"/> |
| (yyyy-mm-dd)   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New (posted in the last 7 days) |  |
| Public Participation                                     | Was conducted <input type="radio"/>          |
|  | Was not conducted <input type="radio"/>      |
|  | Both <input checked="" type="radio"/>        |
| Follow-up Program  | Yes <input type="radio"/>                    |
|  | No <input type="radio"/>                     |
|  | Both <input checked="" type="radio"/>        |
| <input type="button" value="» Search"/>                  |  |







|                                     |                                  |                                    |                        |                             |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <a href="#">Français</a>            | <a href="#">Contact Us</a>       | <a href="#">Help</a>               | <a href="#">Search</a> | <a href="#">Canada Site</a> |
| <a href="#">Home</a>                | <a href="#">About the Agency</a> | <a href="#">Media Room</a>         | <a href="#">Links</a>  | <a href="#">Site Map</a>    |
| <a href="#">Search the Registry</a> |                                  | <a href="#">About the Registry</a> |                        |                             |

|   |
|---|
| <a href="#">Environmental Assessments</a>           |
| <a href="#">Public Participation</a>                |
| <a href="#">How to do Environmental Assessments</a> |
| <a href="#">Legislation &amp; Regulations</a>       |
| <a href="#">Training Opportunities</a>              |
| <a href="#">Research &amp; Development</a>          |
| <a href="#">Strategic Environmental Assessment</a>  |
| <a href="#">Publications</a>                        |
| <a href="#">Frequently Asked Questions</a>          |

Canadian  
Environmental  
Assessment  
Registry

[CEAR Main »](#)

A primer for  
Industry

Will your project need  
a federal EA? [More »](#)

[Search our site](#)

[CEAR Home](#) » [Geographic View](#) » [Nova Scotia](#)

## Canadian Environmental Assessment Registry



Results for:  
Province / Territory: [Nova Scotia](#)

### Search Within Nova Scotia

Keyword(s)

Province / Territory  
**Nova Scotia**

Active Within Date Range:  
To

yyyy-mm-dd  
☐ New (posted in the last 7 days)

[Search](#)  
[Advanced Search](#)

#### Select a Province:

- [Alberta](#)
- [British Columbia](#)
- [Manitoba](#)
- [New Brunswick](#)
- [Newfoundland and Labrador](#)
- [Northwest Territories](#)
- [Nova Scotia](#)
- [Nunavut](#)
- [Ontario](#)
- [Prince Edward Island](#)
- [Quebec](#)
- [Saskatchewan](#)
- [Yukon Territory](#)

Updated: 2004-02-25

[Important Notices](#)

