

It's Not Easy Being Green: The Politics of Canada's Green Plan

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Le 11 décembre 1990, le gouvernement fédéral canadien introduisait le Plan Vert, un plan d'action environnementale complet associé à un budget de 3 milliards \$ et destiné à guider la politique environnementale fédérale au cours des cinq années suivantes. Cet article examine les instruments d'action contenus dans le Plan. Nous développons une classification pour ces instruments et nous offrons une explication des choix qui ont été faits. Nous montrons que le Plan Vert contient un nombre surprenamment faible de mesures pour protéger directement l'environnement, qu'il s'agisse de réglementation visant à restreindre ou à prévenir la pollution, de taxes pour pénaliser les comportements polluants, ou de dépenses de nettoyage. On s'aperçoit plutôt que la majorité des mesures visent à générer et à disséminer de l'information concernant l'environnement. Nous avons analysé ce phénomène à travers un modèle où des agents rationnels interagissent à l'intérieur d'un contexte institutionnel et idéologique. Nous montrons alors que le contenu du Plan Vert s'explique mieux par une combinaison d'impératifs électoraux influençant le gouvernement conservateur, d'incitations budgétaires des fonctionnaires du Ministère de l'Environnement, de contraintes institutionnelles imposées par le gouvernement et par le fédéralisme, et d'une conception sociale particulière de l'idée de développement durable.

On December 11, 1990, the Canadian federal government introduced the Green Plan, a \$3 billion comprehensive environmental action plan intended to guide federal environmental policy over the ensuing five years. This article examines the policy instruments contained in the Green Plan. We develop a classification of instruments in the plan, and then offer an explanation for the observed pattern. We argue that the Green Plan contains a surprising paucity of measures to directly protect the environment, whether regulations to restrict or prevent pollution, taxes to penalize polluting behaviour, or spending for clean up. Rather, the overwhelming balance of initiatives is concerned with generating and disseminating information about the environment. We have analysed the interaction of rational actors within an institutional and ideological context, and argued that the contents of the Green Plan are best explained by a combination of the electoral incentives of the Conservative government, the budgetary incentives of Department of Environment bureaucrats, the institutional constraints posed by cabinet government and federalism, and a particular social construction of the idea of sustainable development.

Overview¹

On December 11, 1990, the Canadian federal government introduced the Green Plan, a \$3 billion comprehensive environ-

mental action plan intended to guide federal environmental policy over the ensuing five years (Government of Canada, 1990a). In this article, we argue that the Green Plan contains a surprising paucity of meas-

ures to directly protect the environment, whether regulations to restrict or prevent pollution, taxes to penalize polluting behaviour, or spending for clean up. Rather, the overwhelming balance of initiatives is concerned with generating and disseminating information about the environment.

This pattern of instrument choice is consistent both with the influence of budget-maximizing bureaucrats, and with efforts by the Mulroney government to claim credit for introducing a major environmental initiative, while avoiding the blame associated with disrupting the traditional machinery of the federal government, imposing concentrated costs on powerful business interests, and provoking a turf war with jurisdictionally defensive provinces. It is noteworthy, however, that the Green Plan's heavy reliance on research and information dissemination is not consistent with the instrument choices of a government motivated to take immediate and direct action to protect the environment.

The following section surveys theories of instrument choice and offers our own theoretical perspective. The third section uses the theoretical framework to analyse the interests of the various actors involved in formulating the Green Plan. The fourth section traces the development of the Green Plan, which we then analyse using a typology of policy instruments in the fifth section. The sixth section offers an explanation for the content of the plan, which is followed by an analysis of the political impact of the plan and conclusions.

Theoretical Approaches to Instrument Choice

Two approaches to instrument choice have dominated the Canadian literature. The first is that developed by Bruce Doern and colleagues, who emphasize the degree of coercion associated with different policy instruments (Doern and Wilson, 1974; Doern and Phidd, 1983). They identify several classes of instruments available to governments and place them on a continuum of

low to high coercion, with the most coercive policy instrument being public enterprise, followed by regulation, expenditure, and exhortation. Doern and Wilson argue that 'politicians (especially the collective cabinet) have a strong tendency to respond to policy issues (any issue) by moving successively from the least coercive to the most coercive' (Doern and Wilson, 1974:339). Despite its simplicity, this insight has proven to be a powerful predictor of government behaviour.

The second dominant approach is reflected in the works of M.J. Trebilcock and other public choice theorists, who emphasize the re-election incentives of politicians. The choice of instruments can 'be weighed against the calculus of how they serve the end of enhancing the prospects of the election or re-election by the political decision makers' (Trebilcock et al., 1982:24; Hartle, 1988). As a result, politicians will favour instruments which 'concentrate benefits of policies on marginal voters and do not disperse those benefits over inframarginal voters who are either so committed to the party or so alienated from it that the benefits would have no effect on voting behaviour' (Trebilcock et al., 1982:29). This approach is not inconsistent with that of Doern and colleagues. Indeed, although Doern and Richard Phidd place less emphasis on marginal voters, electoral calculus can be seen as the mechanism determining politicians' preferences for less coercive instruments.

In an insightful review of the policy instrument literature, Kenneth Woodside questions the prevailing assumption that different policy instruments are readily substitutable in various policy areas (Woodside, 1986). Constitutional limits, legal constraints on instrument choice by departments and agencies, past policy choices, ideology, and budgetary constraints are all factors that restrict the range of policy instruments available to the decision-maker. The emerging wisdom in the field is that the choice of policy instruments reflects the political context from

which they arise.²

Like the public choice perspective, our framework analyses instrument choice as the result of strategic interactions among a complex set of actors, each with their own incentives and resources. However, we acknowledge that those interactions do not take place in a vacuum, and thus also consider the ways in which institutions and ideas shape actors' incentives and resources.

We begin with the assumption that politicians are instrumental in determining the content of policies, and that the most powerful interest of politicians 'is to be elected (or re-elected) as members of a government in power and to obtain offices of ever-increasing power and authority in that government' (Hartle, 1988:49). However, while public opinion gives the government a general sense of direction, it typically offers little specific guidance concerning the design of particular policies. The particulars result from the complex interactions of key actors, ranging from the cabinet and various departments to the relevant interest groups and other levels of government, with each pursuing their own interests given resource constraints.

As a collective body, cabinet seeks to govern in a way that will maximize its chances of re-election. However, individual ministers, while ever mindful of that collective purpose, have their own portfolios which they use to ensure their own prospects of re-election as well as to enhance their influence within government. They thus compete with each other for influence, resources, and prestige. Bureaucrats are also motivated by influence and prestige, whether for its own sake or to pursue personal policy objectives. William Niskanen offers an influential model of budget-maximizing bureaucrats competing for resources to pursue their interests, while James Q. Wilson places greater emphasis on bureaucrats' interest in protecting and enhancing their autonomy (Niskanen, 1971; Wilson, 1989: chap.10).

Interest groups try to influence govern-

ment policy by bringing various resources to bear, including money, votes, and credible information. However, as observed by Wilson, the organization and resources available to different interests reflect the distribution of costs and benefits associated with the policy issue in question (Wilson, 1975; Lowi, 1964). Policies with diffuse beneficiaries and concentrated victims tend to elicit very different politics than those where, for instance, both 'winners' and 'losers' are concentrated. The critical concept underlying Wilson's argument is Mancur Olson's insight that individuals who are diffusely affected, whether winners or losers, are unlikely to organize to pursue their shared political goals, or even to inform themselves about the nature of the costs and benefits they bear (Olson, 1965). It follows that democratic governments, motivated to claim credit and avoid blame from voters, would be inclined to pursue policy objectives through reliance on instruments that confer concentrated benefits, while resisting those with concentrated costs (Weaver, 1986; 1988). Indeed, the extent to which costs are concentrated can serve as a surrogate measure for the coerciveness emphasized by Doern and his co-authors.

The incentives and resources of various actors are also shaped by the institutional context. First, the constitutional division of powers between federal and provincial governments constrains policy-makers, although jurisdictional uncertainty can leave considerable room for manoeuvre. Second, Canadian-style cabinet government, with its strong party discipline, centralizes authority and limits veto points during the term of a majority government. Finally, the 'machinery of government' at the federal level allocates a great deal of power to central agencies which control the purse strings and the cabinet agenda.

The policy process also takes place within the context of dominant ideas. In order for a policy to achieve legitimacy, it must conform to the expectations of actors within the relevant policy community con-

cerning the policy-making process, as well as to the prevailing social construction of the issue, in terms of causal relations and target populations. Strategic actors struggle to influence issue construction in ways that further their interests (Manzer, 1985; Stone, 1988; Schneider and Ingram, 1993).

Influence of Interests, Institutions, and Ideas on the Green Plan

Thus far, we have characterized the design of public policies, including choice of policy instruments, as the outcome of interactions among a complex array of actors, within the context of institutional constraints and dominant ideas. In this section, we apply those concepts to the case of environmental policy by analysing the incentives of federal politicians and bureaucrats, in light of the institutions of parliamentary government and federalism and the prevailing ideas concerning 'sustainable development'.

Politicians and Public Opinion

Given the 'public goods' character of natural resources, the benefits of environmental protection are inherently diffuse. An Olsonian analysis would suggest that the odds are weighted against public attention to environmental issues. There is, however, evidence that a combination of effective political entrepreneurship and unusual events that capture the media's attention can cause even those diffusely affected to sit up and take notice, and thus lead electorally-minded politicians to do the same (Farber, 1992).

To date, there have been two such periods of public attention to the environment, the first around 1970, and the second around 1990. In the late 1980s, public opinion polls revealed a dramatic increase in public concern for the environment.³ Gallup reported that the percentage of Canadians who perceived the dangers of pollution to be 'very serious,' which had declined between the early 1970s and mid-1980s to a low of 51 per cent, began to increase again in 1985, reaching an all-time high of 77 per

cent by 1990 (*The Gallup Report*, May 28, 1990). The increasing salience of environmental issues was revealed by voters' responses to the open-ended question 'What is the most important problem facing the country today'. While Gallup did not even mention the environment in reporting responses to the question between 1975 and 1985, by July 1989, it was the top ranked problem by 16.5 per cent of respondents, just ahead of unemployment at 16.4 per cent.⁴ Environics also reported that the environment reached the top of the public's priorities during 1989, with 21 per cent of respondents identifying it as the nation's most important problem (Miller, 1991).

This remarkable surge in public concern provided a motivation not only for government action in general, but *federal* government action in particular. Polls showed that, when asked which level of government they consider primarily responsible for protecting the environment, significantly more Canadians chose the federal government over provincial governments.⁵ However, growing public concern for the environment posed a problem for the Conservative government, since its reputation on the environmental issue had been severely tarnished in its first term as a result of politically ill-conceived budget cuts during the tenure of Suzanne Blais-Grenier (Doern, 1992). Blais-Grenier's successor as Environment Minister, Tom McMillan, had done much to restore the government's image by introducing the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* in 1988 and creating South Moresby National Park. Nonetheless, the explosion of public concern demanded further governmental actions.

While strong public demand in a particular policy field can be expected to increase politicians' willingness to impose losses, despite the inherently diffuse benefits of environmental protection, they would nonetheless be expected to prefer to spread the costs around if possible, or even to substitute symbolic policies if such policies can satisfy public demands for action.⁶ When

public attention faded, as it did on the environmental issue in the early 1970s, politicians who had offered only symbolic commitments could easily return to 'business as usual' in protecting concentrated interests and ignoring diffuse ones.

A wide variety of policy instruments can be employed in more sincere efforts to pursue environmental objectives. Although the environmental benefits of spending programs remain diffuse, expenditures can be used to convey concentrated economic benefits, whether in the form of a sewage treatment plant on a native reserve or a research grant to a university, with costs diffused among taxpayers at large. The costs of education and research programs are similarly diffused, although the distribution of benefits is more difficult to generalize. Depending on how they are designed, 'green taxes' intended to discourage environmentally harmful behaviour can have a diffuse impact on a broad range of consumers, or more concentrated impacts on particular sectors, such as the fossil fuel industry in the case of a carbon tax. Finally, environmental regulation typically involves the imposition of concentrated costs on regulated industries in order to confer diffuse benefits on the public at large.⁷

Politicians pursuing re-election would be expected to select the policy instruments that allow them to claim credit for concentrated benefits and avoid blame for imposing concentrated losses. In particular, we anticipate that governments would be reluctant to rely on coercive instruments like regulation and taxes in pursuing their environmental objectives in light of the concentrated costs involved, and that they would favour spending programs with diffuse costs and, ideally, geographically or sectorally concentrated benefits.

The Bureaucratic Perspective

While the surge of public concern for the environment may have posed difficult dilemmas for the Mulroney government, it was an extraordinary asset to Environment Canada, a department that historically had

lacked prestige and power within the cabinet. The new era of environmental concern created an opportunity to expand the resources and authority of the department significantly. However, the preferences of department officials concerning instrument choice are not immediately obvious. Niskanen's 'budget-maximizing bureaucrats' clearly would favour spending programs, particularly those like in-house research that allow federal bureaucrats to deliver programs themselves, rather than merely transfer funds to others. However, it is also conceivable that environmentally-committed bureaucrats would press for regulatory programs, which would increase their regulatory authority over the private sector, while accommodating the government's preoccupation with fiscal austerity.

Of course, the Department of the Environment (DOE) was not the only department involved. In attempting to formulate a comprehensive environmental plan, DOE had to operate within a federal government in which other actors were at best anxious and at worst hostile. There were two bases of concern: money and autonomy (Doern, 1992:367-8). In addition to the traditional conflict between DOE as a 'spending' department and Finance and the Treasury Board as 'guardians' of the federal purse (Savoie, 1990), other line departments were locked in a negative sum conflict over shares of a shrinking budgetary pie. If the environment was going to receive billions of dollars in new money in a time of fiscal austerity, it would have to come from someone else's budget. In addition, the Green Plan had the potential to threaten the autonomy of other departments. To the extent that environmental considerations were really going to be elevated to the same status as economic concerns, it would be far more difficult for many departments to pursue their traditional mandates without DOE's interference. Thus, in order for the Green Plan to succeed, it would have to either avoid or surmount the obstacles of opposition from within the federal government.

The Intergovernmental Context

Federalism is a significant institutional feature in the environmental field. Since environmental quality was not a prominent political issue in 1867, it is hardly surprising that responsibility for environmental protection was not explicitly allocated to either the federal or provincial legislatures by the *British North America Act*. The result has been a substantial degree of both overlap and uncertainty, and an intergovernmental arena characterized more by federal-provincial bargaining than constitutional litigation (Harrison, 1993).

Prior to the late 1980s, the federal government played a largely supporting role in the environmental field, conducting research, offering technical expertise, regulating mobile source emissions, and encouraging the provinces to adopt consistent national standards. In contrast, provincial governments assumed the role of 'front line' protectors of the environment – setting standards for environmental and effluent quality, issuing permits for individual sources, and enforcing both provincial and federal standards.

However, with the explosion of environmental concern in the late 1980s and growing public demand for a federal lead role on the environment, the federal government became more constitutionally adventurous, passing the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* in 1988 (Harrison, 1993: chap.8). The larger provinces in particular were concerned by growing federal assertiveness. Their fears subsequently were compounded by a series of court decisions involving the federal Environmental Assessment and Review Process, which enabled environmental groups to force the federal government to exercise its extensive environmental jurisdiction.⁸ The court decisions fuelled tensions between the federal role in environmental protection and provincial authority to promote economic development through exploitation of their own natural resources.

In that context, it is not surprising that the provinces were anxious about the forth-

coming federal Green Plan. Opposition was strongest from Alberta, where discussions of a federal master plan for the environment sounded disturbingly similar to the National Energy Program (NEP), and where rumours of a carbon tax threatened the fossil fuel industry. The Alberta press highlighted the fact that the new federal Deputy Minister of the Environment, Len Good, had played a key role in the NEP, and dubbed the yet-to-be-released Green Plan 'Son of NEP' (Dabbs, 1990). Provinces were less troubled by the possibility that they might gain access to federal funds, as long as their autonomy would not be fettered by federal restrictions.

The Climate of Ideas

During this period of growing public demand for environmental protection, the federal government was controlled by a neo-conservative party emphasizing deficit reduction, privatization, free trade and competitiveness. However, the potential conflict between environmentalism and neo-conservatism was averted by the convenient emergence of the concept of 'sustainable development'.

Originally derived from the work of the United Nation's Brundtland Commission (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), the concept has come to mean different things to different people. The origins of such diverse interpretations lie in the Brundtland report itself. On one hand, the Commission makes a powerful case for radical reforms, arguing that economic development cannot be sustained if it is not environmentally sustainable. On the other hand, it offers developed countries the promise that at least some economic development can be compatible with environmental conservation. The profoundly redistributive implications of the former are softened by the promise of the latter.

In Canadian domestic discourse, there has been much greater focus on the compatibility of economic growth and environmental protection than on the poten-

tially dramatic and painful changes that may be required to achieve sustainability. Not surprisingly, politicians have displayed little stomach for condemning unsustainable economic activity, preferring instead to highlight 'win-win' opportunities, in which environmentally sound practices are also profitable. This conception has implications for instrument choice, since if profit-seeking and environmental protection are indeed compatible, one need only educate people and they will voluntarily change their behaviour, without need for coercive measures.

Green Plan Formulation

In formulating the Green Plan, the Department of Environment confronted a political environment consisting of strong support from the general public and the environmental community, reluctant if not hostile partners within the federal government, jurisdictionally sensitive provinces, and a business community concerned about the price tag. This section describes how DOE's attempts to manoeuvre around these constraints shaped the content of the Green Plan.

The environmental portfolio found its first real champion within government in Lucien Bouchard, who was appointed Environment Minister after the 1988 election. As a close personal friend at the time of the Prime Minister, Bouchard brought considerable clout to the environment portfolio. Bouchard was inspired by the Brundtland Commission's call for integration of economic and environmental considerations, and called for preparation of what he referred to as an environmental 'master plan' (confidential interviews). Although Bouchard's inexperience is credited with alienating his cabinet colleagues, his personal relationship with the Prime Minister, combined with clear public demand for federal action on the environment, enabled him to get the Green Plan on the cabinet agenda and keep it there. While skittish about Bouchard's pronouncements regarding the

need to subject all government decisions to environmental review (Howard, 1989), cabinet authorized him to begin developing a comprehensive environmental initiative.

The process of preparing a Green Plan began in earnest in the summer of 1989, under the direction of the Policy Directorate of DOE's Corporate Planning Group. While DOE knew all along that there inevitably would be budgetary constraints, DOE staff and other relevant departments nonetheless were asked to develop proposals as if they faced no restraints. As one DOE official described it: 'What we told people was let your imagination run wild, have all your crazy singing in the shower ideas, put them down on paper, don't give a damn whether it adds up to 1, 10 or 20 billion. We want good ideas and creative juices. We'll come to grips with budgetary realities later' (confidential interview).⁹ For a department still suffering from low morale after the budget cuts of the Mulroney government's first term, it was a heady exercise.

From the beginning, the intention was to be able to claim a specific budgetary commitment for the Green Plan. As a result, Finance considered the Green Plan a budgetary document with all the concomitant restrictions. The resulting secrecy created considerable anxiety among all interested parties. Industry was nervous about potential costs, while environmentalists were stunned by what they considered a reversal in the government's recent commitment to full public participation. Leaks that began to occur merely heightened the sense of paranoia. When a section of the plan containing a carbon tax was leaked to the Business Council on National Issues, the group rushed to the Prime Minister's Office to object and demand more active consultation (confidential interviews; Runnels, 1993:4).

The first version of the Green Plan was presented by Bouchard to Priorities and Planning in January 1990. While the cabinet perceived the need to do something on the environment, there was stiff resistance to an aggressive plan. The press reported that the strongest resistance came from the

Deputy Prime Minister, and the Ministers of Finance, Industry, International Trade, and Treasury Board, while the Minister himself later reflected that the strongest resistance came from bureaucrats in other departments who feared a 'power grab' by the Environment Department (Howard, 1990a; Speirs, 1990). The bottom line was that the cabinet was not ready to agree to the initiative in the form that it was presented. The cabinet instructed Bouchard to engage in public consultations and then re-submit the plan.

The consultation process that followed was fraught with problems. Just as the consultations were about to begin, Lucien Bouchard resigned in protest over the government's constitutional proposals. Moreover, the document released by the government as the basis for discussion was denounced by the opposition, environmentalists, and academics as weak and short on detail (Environment Canada, 1990; Doern, 1990). However, the government quickly appointed Robert de Cotret, a skilled cabinet operative, as Bouchard's successor, and forged on with a massive public consultation program, including 41 information sessions attended by 6,000 people, two day consultations in 17 cities attended by 3,500 people, and a wrap-up session in Ottawa attended by approximately 400 'stakeholders,' all at a cost of roughly \$7 million (Government of Canada 1990b; Howard, 1990b).

Despite the scope and expense, the consultations were a political disaster for DOE. Although industry groups had problems with the consultations, environmental groups were even more upset. They complained that the vagueness of the discussion document and the vast number of participants prevented any meaningful analysis of options or discussion of priorities. DOE could not shake environmentalists' perceptions that the key decisions were already made and the consultations mere window dressing and a delaying tactic (McIlroy, 1990; Simpson, 1990a).

When the consultations ended in late

August 1990, difficult negotiations within the federal government resumed. Central agencies were concerned about DOE's apparent aspirations for central agency status, and the need to come up with large budgetary sums in an era of fiscal austerity. Other line departments that initially had been reluctant to get involved at all now realized that the Prime Minister was committed to a substantial new spending initiative, and were eager to compete for their share of the budget, as long as it did not come with significant strings attached in the form of new restrictions on their authority (confidential interviews).

After difficult and lengthy discussions, the cabinet finally agreed to the Green Plan, and the \$3 billion program was announced on December 11, 1990. While figures were given for how the \$3 billion would be allocated among eight very broad categories in the plan, no budgets had been approved for individual Green Plan initiatives. Thus, DOE would be required to return for cabinet approval for funding of each individual initiative. It is also noteworthy that more than half of the \$3 billion in Green Plan money was assigned to departments other than DOE.

Despite the hefty price tag, the plan was not well received by the press, the opposition, or the environmental community. Frustrated by what they considered to be a deeply flawed consultation process, and unimpressed by the substance of the plan, the response of environmentalists was overwhelmingly negative. Initial media reports also were almost uniformly unfavourable.¹⁰ As one environmentalist noted, 'It was amazing - it was the country's first comprehensive environmental plan, it contained \$3 billion of new spending, and it was universally dumped on' (confidential interview).

Reaction by industry and provinces was more favourable, however. Remarkably, the Alberta business community, which had been particularly hostile to the plan's development, openly praised the final product (Carlisle, 1990; Doern, 1991). Seeing

little threat to their jurisdiction, provincial officials breathed a collective sigh of relief. An Ontario Ministry of Environment official recalled, 'Our first reaction was "is that all there is?";' while an Alberta Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs official described the Green Plan as a 'paper tiger' (confidential interviews).

The Content of the Green Plan

This section analyses the policy instruments contained in the plan. There are several prominent typologies of policy instruments. Perhaps the most well-known is the four-fold classification developed by Doern and colleagues. Ranked from low to high degrees of coercion, the instruments are exhortation, expenditure, regulation (including taxation), and government ownership (Doern and Wilson, 1974; Doern and Phidd, 1983). More recently, Hood has developed a more complex, two dimensional scheme, based on a functional distinction between 'effectors' and 'detectors,' and four government resources available to perform those functions: nodality, treasure, authority, and organization (Hood, 1986). There are substantial similarities between these two typologies. Doern's expenditure category is synonymous with Hood's treasury, and there is considerable overlap between Doern's exhortation, regulation, and government ownership categories with Hood's nodality, authority, and organization.

In classifying the policy instruments in the Green Plan, we found that we needed to go beyond the distinctions developed by Doern and Hood. As displayed in Table 1, our classification includes six categories, which vary significantly according to the level of coercion involved and also how directly they seek to improve environmental quality.¹¹ The most coercive and direct category is regulation, defined broadly as rules of behaviour backed up by the legitimate sanctions of the state (Doern, 1978: 14). Examples include limits on the quantity of toxic chemicals in effluents, or re-

strictions on the use of chloroflourocarbons to protect the ozone layer. We have subdivided this category into the creation of new regulatory authority (e.g., legislation to authorize regulations), proposed regulations pursuant to statutory authority, actual issuance of regulations, and enforcement.

The second category is 'direct spending'. Although all categories necessarily involve some government spending, what distinguishes this category is that the funds are directly allocated to cleaning up the environment or providing for the protection of valued areas. While less coercive than regulation because costs are diffused through reliance on tax revenues, this type of spending can have a similarly direct impact on environmental quality, though at government rather than private sector expense.

The third, fourth, and fifth categories all describe activities concerning information generation and dissemination. Although these activities bear some resemblance to Doern's category of 'exhortation' and Hood's category of 'nodality,' we found both to be too vague to describe the different ways in which information is treated in the Green Plan. As a result, we adopted a three-part distinction between regulating, disseminating, and developing information.

Rather than directly regulating environmentally damaging behaviour, the third category, 'information regulation,' involves requiring actors to either publicize certain information, as through mandatory labelling, or to consider certain information in making decisions, such as environmental impact assessment.¹² The fourth category is 'information dissemination'. Rather than requiring others to produce information, in this case the government assumes the cost of distributing the information itself. Examples include eco-labelling, 'state of the environment reporting,' and non-binding guidelines for polluting industries. While they do not demand any significant change in behaviour, both information reg-

Table 1
Policy instruments in the Green Plan

	Initial Green Plan	1st 27 months
1. Regulation	28 (12%)	13 (8%)
a. new regulatory authority		3
b. issuance of regulation		2
c. proposed regulations		5
d. enforcement		3
2. Direct Spending	18 (8%)	13 (8%)
a. clean-up, restoring habitat		9
b. acquisition, maintenance of protected areas		4
3. Information Regulation	3 (1%)	4 (2%)
4. Information Dissemination	43 (18%)	30 (18%)
a. information provision and public education		26
b. guidelines		4
5. Information Development	133 (56%)	93 (56%)
a. public participation		6
b. new institutions or organizations		2
c. technology development/demonstration projects		15
d. research		27
e. detection, classification, monitoring		19
f. plan development		15
g. enhancement of administrative capabilities		3
h. conferences		6
6. Agreements	14 (6%)	14 (8%)
a. intergovernmental, no action specified		3
b. international, no action specified		1
c. international, general commitment		9
d. public/private agreement, general commitment		1
Total	239	167

ulation and dissemination seek to promote environmental objectives indirectly by informing individuals' choices and by persuading them to change their behaviour.

The fifth category, 'information development,' includes a wide variety of mechanisms that government uses to gather and generate information. We have subdivided the category into several parts, including public participation, through which the government gathers information on the preferences of the public, monitoring of environmental quality, research on environmental problems, and development and demonstration of environmental control technologies. Initiatives in this category do not lead directly to improvements in environ-

mental quality, but have the potential to increase governmental capacity to understand environmental problems and their solutions. In the long run, they may lead to further initiatives designed to actually improve environmental quality. However, these initiatives differ from those discussed thus far in that they are not designed to promote any immediate change in environmentally harmful behaviour, whether by government or the private sector.

The final category, 'agreements,' is even less directly related to changing behaviour. The handshake type of agreements included here merely enable the federal government to express concern and a general commitment to dealing with en-

vironmental problems. Agreements outlining more specific courses of action were assigned to other categories, depending on the type of actions planned.

Two types of instruments prominent in generic classification schemes are notably absent from the Green Plan. First, government ownership has played virtually no role in contemporary environmental policy at the federal level, and little at the provincial level. While Crown corporations, such as electric utilities, can be a significant source of environmental problems, governments have not nationalized industries or purchased shares of private firms in order to protect the environment. However, Crown corporations such as the Ontario Waste Management Corporation have been used sparingly at the provincial level as a way to facilitate siting of hazardous waste facilities. Since the Green Plan does not propose reliance on public enterprise, the category is not included here.

Second, economic instruments such as marketable permits have gained prominence in recent years. Only two of the 239 initiatives in the Green Plan include even the possibility of marketable permits, and for our purposes they have been considered part of a regulatory program. While the alternative approach of pollution taxes could be classified under a separate 'taxation' category, none were included in the Green Plan. In lieu of greater reliance on such innovative instruments, the government promised to issue a discussion paper on the subject, thus substituting information development for more direct action (Government of Canada, 1990a:109, 158).¹³

Several problems were confronted in the effort to classify the initiatives. At the most basic level, in order to address the question of which instruments the federal government relied on most, one enters the realm of comparing apples and oranges. A comparison based on budgetary commitments would, by definition, overemphasize expenditures and underestimate the importance of regulatory programs, which shift costs to the private sector. Although one might

wish to compare the impact on environmental quality of different programs, many of the Green Plan proposals are so indirect that such a comparison would be entirely speculative. We thus settled on the straightforward technique of counting the number of initiatives in different categories, while acknowledging the attendant risk of treating minor initiatives and significant ones alike. As discussed below, we were reassured by the imbalance in the results that any resulting biases would have to be extremely large to change the overall conclusions.

Some initiatives in the initial Green Plan were so vague as to be difficult to classify. For example, in several cases, it was unclear whether an initiative would involve a regulation with the force of law, or a non-binding guideline. Other proposed initiatives had multiple purposes, and could be classified in several different categories. For instance, the Environmental Citizenship program funds clean-up projects (category 2), education projects (category 4), and environmental groups (category 5). When confronted with such uncertainties, we chose to err on the coercive side.

There may also be some confusion about the number of initiatives. By our count, the Green Plan contains 239 distinct initiatives. The total number of initiatives announced under the Green Plan is usually quoted as being only about 120, referring to the separate areas in which action is promised. Typically, however, several different actions are included within each area. Since each of these actions may involve the use of a different policy instrument, we have classified them individually, and thus our total differs from that usually given.¹⁴

As of March 1993, 167 initiatives had been announced.¹⁵ However, it is not always possible to compare original Green Plan initiatives with those that have been announced during the implementation stage. As initiatives are announced, they frequently contain a more refined program than that described in the original Green Plan. As a result, the total number of ini-

tiatives announced after the first 27 months cannot be subtracted from the total number of Green Plan initiatives in order to calculate how many initiatives are left to be implemented. Table 1 thus includes separate analyses of the initial Green Plan proposals and the specific initiatives that were announced in the first 27 months of the program.¹⁶

The most striking result is the disproportionate reliance on expenditure programs that seek to influence behaviour only indirectly, if at all, and the relatively small number of initiatives that directly affect environmental quality. Regulatory and direct expenditure initiatives together account for only 20 per cent of the initiatives in the original Green Plan, and 16 per cent of the initiatives announced thus far. It bears stressing that despite the heavy emphasis on expenditures, Green Plan spending is not oriented towards direct cleanup. There is only one significant environmental cleanup program, for water and sewage services on Indian lands. By far the most frequently used instrument is 'information development,' which accounts for over half of all initiatives in both the original plan and the initiatives already announced.

As of March 1993, only 13 regulatory initiatives had been announced, but even that small figure probably overstates the extent of coercion involved. It includes four initiatives to increase the capacity of the government to enforce its regulations, which do not guarantee a higher level of enforcement or compliance. Also included are three new statutory grants of regulatory authority, which past experience clearly indicates are no guarantee that the authority will ever be used.¹⁷ Remarkably, as of March 1993, only two final regulatory actions had been taken under the Green Plan.¹⁸

As the analysis of policy instruments shows, the Green Plan is strongly weighted towards spending on research and public education, and away from more coercive measures like taxes or regulation. To the extent that the Green Plan is a spending program, it is largely oriented towards in-

formation development, rather than environmental clean-up. Our conclusion is reinforced by the observation that from the beginning, the Green Plan was conceived and presented as a spending program. The almost exclusive focus of government statements, press accounts, and even environmentalists' and opposition parties' criticisms has been the amount of money being spent. Remarkably little attention has been paid to potential impact of the plan on private sector spending, or for that matter, on environmental quality.¹⁹ This reflects a unique social construction of the environmental issue in Canada. As a point of contrast, when the United States Congress enacted the very significant *Clean Air Act* amendments of 1990, the discussion was dominated by assessments of the regulatory burden that would be imposed on business, with almost no discussion of administrative costs (Cohen, 1992).

Our conclusion calls into question Doern's description of the Green Plan as 'broadly regulatory in nature and, therefore, quite interventionist' (Doern, 1992: 368). Elsewhere, Doern argues that, 'The Green Plan fails the larger test of economic and environmental relevance ... because it avoids a serious commitment to the use of market-based instruments as a complement to traditional regulation' (Doern, 1991). In contrast, we view the Green Plan as a failure not because it fails to introduce market-based alternatives to 'command and control' regulation, but because it does not regulate nearly enough by either means.

Explaining the Contents of the Green Plan

The pattern of instruments contained in the Green Plan is consistent with an effort by electorally-motivated politicians to claim credit for taking action on the environment while simultaneously avoiding the blame associated with imposing concentrated costs on industry or threatening the jurisdiction of provinces. The very emer-

gence of a substantial new spending program in a climate of fiscal austerity attests to the influence of heightened public concern for the environment in the late 1980s. However, the Plan's distinct preference for spending over regulation reflects the influence of industry and its allies within the federal cabinet, as well as resistance to a federal power grab by the provinces.

The federal government's reticence not only to regulate, but also to spend money on actual clean up and conservation activities can also be explained by politicians' electoral incentives. A government intent on avoiding blame must walk a fine line to maintain the credibility of its claims for credit. Programs to subsidize polluters' cleanup activities might be perceived by the public as rewarding those who should be punished, and thus delegitimize the entire Plan.

The pattern of instrument choice is also consistent with the interests of DOE bureaucrats. The heavy emphasis on spending rather than regulation is consistent with Niskanen's hypothesis. Indeed, the particular type of spending initiatives that emerged, with a heavy emphasis on in-house monitoring and research rather than funds that would be passed on to polluters or other governments, enhance federal bureaucrats' own resources. However, we are less inclined to view this as empire building by bureaucrats than as the inevitable result of asking bureaucrats currently engaged in largely non-regulatory activities to take part in a 'singing in the shower' exercise. A 'more of the same' bias is not surprising.

Two significant institutional features influenced the outcome: cabinet government and federalism. The institution of cabinet and its associated machinery of government had several impacts. DOE's power within the federal government was relatively limited. First, central agencies, although forced to fill the environmental purse, nonetheless maintained control over the purse strings by requiring approval for each individual initiative. Second, the need

to secure sufficient cabinet support for the plan is reflected in the fact that more than half of the \$3 billion in Green Plan money was assigned to departments other than DOE (Howard, 1990d). Although some areas of environmental spending are clearly within the jurisdiction of departments other than Environment, such as Indian and Northern Affairs concerning the Arctic, the distribution of substantial funds to other departments is consistent with their interests in expanding their budgets without having their autonomy restricted.

Federalism presented another obstacle in the form of provinces eager to prevent federal intrusion in their jurisdiction. The provinces were particularly concerned that an expanded federal regulatory role would interfere with their ability to direct private economic development, as well as with their proprietary powers as owners of natural resources. They were, however, more receptive to federal spending programs if they were potential beneficiaries, as long as federal largesse did not come with strings attached. While the amount of money in the Green Plan that goes to the provinces is quite limited, provincial resistance to an expanded federal regulatory role reinforced the inclinations of federal politicians to propose non-controversial spending programs.

A revealing example of how all these forces interacted is the fate of proposals for a 'carbon tax'. While there was considerable discussion about such a tax, no formal proposal was ever made. DOE officials believed that the idea was premature, especially given scientific uncertainties surrounding climate change, the absence of international agreement, and domestic political sensitivity. They were interested in the potential application of economic instruments, in this area as well as others, and did not want to jeopardize their future introduction by moving prematurely on such a complex and controversial initiative. Their solution was characteristic of the Green Plan as a whole: propose a study of economic instruments. Officials in Finance and other departments describe the carbon

tax as a 'non-starter'. In addition to the intense opposition from the province of Alberta and the fossil fuel industry, the government was in no mood to move on another tax initiative, while in the throes of introducing the politically unpopular GST (confidential interviews; Doern, 1991:6).

The climate of ideas in which the Green Plan was developed helped to legitimize the outcome. The concept of sustainable development as it evolved in Canada, with strong emphasis on the compatibility of economic growth and environmental protection, offered a convenient justification for reliance on voluntary measures that would not impose significant sacrifices on business.

The outcome thus was the result of several mutually reinforcing forces: the spending incentives of DOE bureaucrats, the electoral incentives of federal politicians, and the institutional interests of other federal departments and the provinces. For the Mulroney government, the need to respond to a resurgence of public concern for the environment presented a dilemma: how to win friends with environmental initiatives without making enemies. While finding \$3 billion for an environmental spending program was no easy chore, it was more appealing than provoking business or provincial opposition by increasing regulation. Environment Canada officials may have been interested in expanding their authority over industry, the provinces, or other federal departments via regulation, but they lacked the power to do so without strong support from the centre. The spending instrument offered DOE officials an opportunity to expand their resources without alienating powerful institutional actors.

Political Impact of the Green Plan

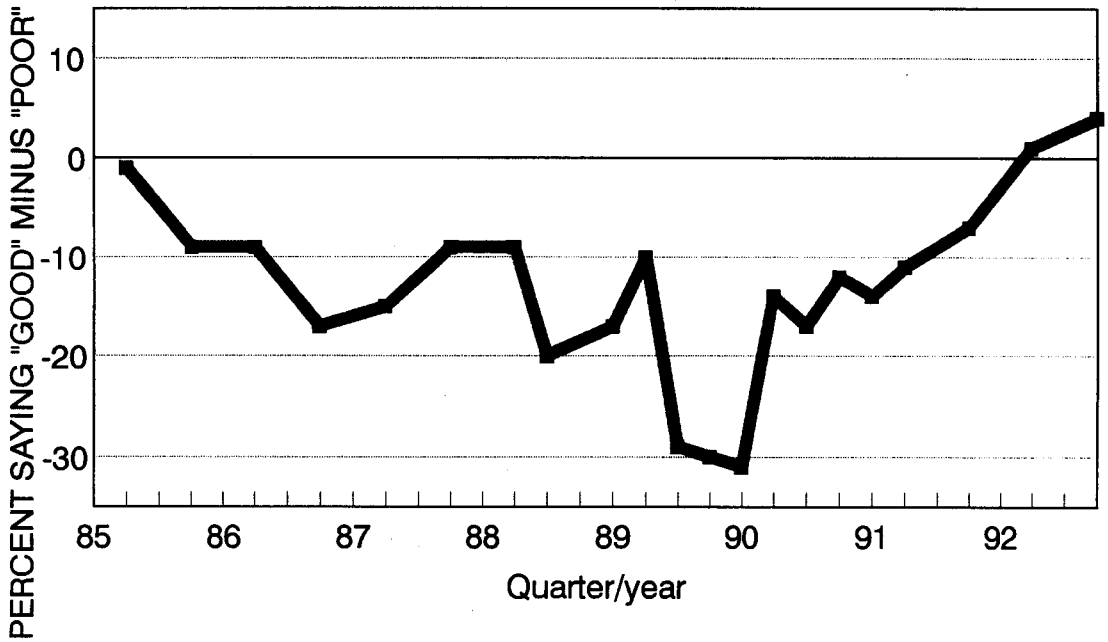
Given the absence of industry and provincial criticism of the Green Plan, the government appears to have achieved its objective of avoiding blame for imposing costs on powerful interests. The question remains,

has it also garnered credit from the public for taking action on the environment?

Polling firms provide quarterly tracking of the government's performance on various issues, including the environment. For example, Decima Quarterly asks Canadians 'Would you say that the federal government is doing a good job or a poor job protecting the environment?' Figure 1 displays the results from Summer 1985 to Winter 1991, the last quarter for which data are publicly available. The 'rating' is the difference between those who rated the federal government's performance as 'good' and those who rated it as 'poor'.

As Figure 1 illustrates, the federal government's approval ratings concerning the environment were extremely negative in late 1989 and early 1990. They improved considerably in early 1990, before the Green Plan was announced, but remained strongly negative. Measuring the impact of the December 11 Green Plan announcement is difficult, because the Winter 1990 Decima poll was conducted from December 8 through December 15, so it is unclear whether the December figures were affected by the announcement. It is conceivable that the five point increase in the government's performance between the Fall of 1990 and the Winter of 1990 reflects a small effect of the Green Plan announcement.²⁰ But what is more striking is the relative stability of the government's rating between the Summer of 1990 and the summer of 1991, when it varied between -11 and -17 points, and that the variation in that period is far less significant than the change that occurred between the Spring and the Summer of 1990, before the Green Plan was announced.

While the nature of these polls makes it hard to judge the impact of the Green Plan, there is some evidence of a modest positive impact. A year after the Green Plan was introduced, *The Environment Monitor* reported that Canadians seemed moderately impressed with the government's initiative. Seven per cent thought the Green Plan would be very effective, 53 per cent thought



SOURCE: *Decima Quarterly*, Courtesy of Queen's University

Figure 1 Trends in government performance on environmental protection

it would be moderately effective, 22 per cent not very effective, and 4 per cent not effective at all.²¹ However, despite apparent approval for the Green Plan, the federal government still had a negative approval rating at the time.

The most striking development in the government's performance rating is its strong improvement in the two years since the Green Plan was introduced, particularly during 1992. The approval rating improved from -7 in December 1991 to +4 in Winter 1992 (Department of the Environment, 1993). This contributed to a 35 point improvement since the depths of the government's rating in the Spring of 1990. Indeed, environmental protection was the only issue on which the federal government's performance was positive.

What explains this remarkable turnaround? Three factors seem to be relevant. First, while the initial Green Plan announcement was not favourably reviewed, the government's participation in the

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro was an overwhelming political success, which may explain the strong improvement in approval ratings in 1992.²² Press coverage was 'phenomenal,' in the words of DOE's media overview, and the tone overwhelmingly positive.²³

The second factor contributing to the government's improved performance is the process of implementing the Green Plan. The lack of specific spending commitments in the original Green Plan allows for regular announcement of new initiatives as they are developed and approved, thus maintaining a high profile for the federal government's efforts on the environment. There were 36 Green Plan announcements in the first year, 55 in the second (Department of the Environment, 1993). Although print media coverage declined by 20 per cent in year two, reflecting extensive coverage of the Plan's unveiling in year one, the coverage that did appear was more favourable.²⁴

Consistent with a strategy of concentrating benefits, DOE found that the most successful announcements in terms of media coverage were 'multi-minister-multi-site' announcements, where an initiative was announced in a number of different locations, each emphasizing local aspects. The announcements had the effect of distributing spending commitments throughout Canada, a classic way to win friends without creating enemies.

A third possible explanation for the government's recovery on the environment has less to do with federal government performance than with the dynamics of public opinion. The improvement in the federal government's approval ratings, which apparently began in mid-1990, coincides with the collapse of the salience of the environment as a 'top of mind' issue a few months earlier. The fact that the ratings trend reversed before both the Green Plan and Rio, suggests that as the priority they accorded to the environment fell, Canadians simply may have been less attentive to the federal government's performance and thus less critical.

Conclusion

As our analysis of policy instruments demonstrates, the most outstanding feature of the Green Plan is that it commits substantial new funds to environmental programs, but does remarkably little to directly clean up or protect the environment. The Plan is strongly weighted towards spending on research and public education, and away from more coercive measures like green taxes or regulation. And while it calls for greater attention to environmental values in federal policy-making, the Green Plan contains few if any threats to the autonomy of other departments or governments.

This pattern of instrument choice is consistent with the proposition developed by Doern and others that governments prefer non-coercive policy instruments. We have tried to supplement that insight with a

framework designed to explain what motivates policy makers to behave in that way. We have analysed the interaction of rational actors within an institutional context, and argued that the contents of the Green Plan are best explained by a combination of mutually reinforcing factors: the electoral incentives of the Conservative government, the budgetary incentives of Department of Environment bureaucrats, and the institutional constraints posed by cabinet government and federalism.

For the Mulroney government, the Green Plan appears to have been a political success. The spending measures in the plan did not provoke the opposition of key interests: industry, the provinces, or powerful federal government departments. And despite persistent attacks from opposition critics and environmentalists, the public came to view the government's performance on the environment positively. The announcement of a major new plan, with an impressive budget of \$3 billion, communicated a sense of government commitment to the issue. A flood of weekly announcements, well-distributed throughout the country, served to reinforce that sense of commitment on a weekly basis. However, while these factors may have had a positive effect on the federal government's approval ratings on environmental issues, the improvement could alternatively be attributed to the increasing prominence of the federal government in international environmental affairs, or merely the declining public interest in environmental issues.

Whether or not the initiative is an environmental success is a different question. While \$3 billion is a major commitment to a new program in the fiscal climate of the early 1990s, what has gone unnoticed is how much more expensive the big ticket environmental clean-up projects – from sewage treatment to hazardous wastes sites – actually are, and how little the federal government is proposing to contribute to those projects. Our view is that with its heavy emphasis on indirect measures such as information development and dissemi-

nation, and lack of more direct measures of regulation, taxation, and spending on clean-up, the improvements in environmental quality resulting from the plan's implementation are uncertain, and likely to be quite modest in the foreseeable future. Although the plan purports to strengthen the capacity of the government to develop environmental policies in the long term, there are remarkably few commitments to address the pressing environmental problems we face today. The Green Plan approach has been justified through a particular construction of the concept of sustainable development that we find highly problematic. By encouraging Canadians to think that they can have environmental protection without economic sacrifice, the Green Plan denies the difficult choices that are called for today if we are ever to achieve a sustainable economy in the future.

Notes

- 1 Research for this paper was funded in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. We would also like to thank Glen Toner for helping us get started, Doug Miller for sharing the results of The Environment Monitor, George Perlin for granting us access to the Queen's Decima Quarterly files, Bob Burge for his extremely prompt processing and communicating of that Decima data, and Karin Albert for her aid in evaluating the Green Plan programs. The Decima Quarterly data used in this paper were originally collected by Decima Research. The data were made available by Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. Neither the original source nor the collectors of the data nor Queen's University bear any responsibility for the analysis or interpretation presented here.
- 2 See also Weaver (1985: chap.3); May (1991). For an analysis that emphasizes the role of institutions and norms in the political context, see Atkinson and Nigol (1989).
- 3 On the dynamics of Canadian public opinion on the environment, see Bakvis and Nevitte (1992).
- 4 The data are from Gallup Canada poll 907-1, conducted in July 1989.
- 5 In 1989, Decima Quarterly reported that, when asked who has primary responsibility for protecting the environment, 34% of Canadians chose the federal government, while only 15% chose the provinces. See also Miller (1991:2).
- 6 For the classic work on government efforts to mollify voters with symbolic initiatives, see Edelman (1964). For an optimistic view on the ability of voters to distinguish symbol from substance, see Farber (1992).
- 7 However, regulation also can be used to deliver concentrated benefits at diffuse cost. For instance, regulations such as those establishing agricultural marketing boards find strong support among those who are regulated. It is thus conceivable that firms or industries with natural or technological advantages with respect to their impact on the environment could actively pursue environmental regulation.
- 8 The evolving jurisprudence in the lower courts was clarified by the Supreme Court in *Friends of the Oldman River Society and The Queen in right of Alberta et al.*, *Dominion Law Reports*, 88 (1992):1-60.
- 9 Another official described the assignment as 'What if you were PM for the day?'
- 10 Note the headlines of a sample of prominent stories: 'Ottawa's green plan called "empty shell"' (Walker, 1990); 'The Green Plan is high on good intentions, low on specific commitments' (Simpson, 1990b); 'Groups sought tree, were "given seedling"' (Mittelstaedt, 1990); '\$3-billion Green Plan unveiled by Ottawa, but details scarce' (Howard, 1990c); 'Green Plan open to abuse, critics charge' (Howard, 1990d).
- 11 An earlier version of this typology was generated in Albert (1992).
- 12 This category reveals an additional conceptual complexity, in that in the first case the government is regulating private actors, and in the second case it is regulating itself. A case could be made for separating the two. Indeed, thus far the policy instruments literature has not considered how governments attempt to influence policy by regulating themselves.
- 13 This initiative was classified as 'information development'.
- 14 We have also deleted a set of initiatives designed to protect historic sites (Government of Canada, 1991:89-90). The questionable status of these programs in the Green Plan is confirmed by their exclusion from the second annual report.
- 15 Sources used to categorize the initiatives announced in the first 27 months are press releases from Environment Canada, supplemented by the first two annual reports (Government of Canada, 1991; 1993).
- 16 Subheadings in most categories were used only for initiatives announced in the first 27 months of the Green Plan, since the original Green Plan proposals were often too vague to support fine distinctions.
- 17 The three statutory changes are the amendments to the *Fisheries Act* (to increase penalties), the *Wild Animal and Plant Protection Act*, and the

Energy Efficiency Act.

- 18 The new pulp and paper regulations came into force in December 1992; the hazardous waste export and import regulatory package came into force in November 1992.
- 19 There are exceptions. Doern notes that 'the Green Plan's regulatory initiatives imply levered spending in the private sector of even larger amounts of money' (Doern, 1992:368-9). In our view, however, he overstates the government's commitment on toxic substances (it commits to 'assessing' not 'regulating' 44 toxic substances). One economist has developed cost estimates for the implementation of the plan, but his work has received little public attention (Sonnen, 1991).
- 20 Another quarterly poll, 'The Environmental Monitor,' showed a 9 percentage point reduction in the number of Canadians rating the government's performance as 'poor' the quarter after the Green Plan was introduced, but the effect disappeared the following quarter.
- 21 *The Environment Monitor: A Joint Venture of Synergistics Consulting Ltd. and Environics Research Group Ltd.* Results from the first and fourth quarters of 1992.
- 22 On Canada's international diplomacy, see Doern (1993).
- 23 Department of the Environment, 'Green Plan Year-Two Media Overview'. While no tracking data are available, three months after Rio, 69% of Canadians agreed with the statement that Canada has shown 'powerful and effective leadership on global environmental issues,' an extraordinary result for a middle power. ('The Environment Monitor: A Joint Venture of Synergistics Consulting Ltd. and Environics Research Group Ltd.,' 1992-3:15.)
- 24 According to the first year media review, 'The tone of initial coverage was more negative than positive but this trend changed as the plan's specific initiatives were announced to present a more balanced view' (Department of the Environment, 1991:1).

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