

HARMONIZATION

by Marilyn Powell

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I attended a Harmonization Workshop in Ottawa on October 5 and 6, 1996. Others attending had received a copy of the draft Accord. However, our Province had not passed on this information prior to the workshop. Provinces were to have held regional consultations, which New Brunswick did not.

Apparently, the French version in Quebec has very different meaning than our English version.

Those attending the Workshop felt the Accord bypasses legislative procedures, and that it poses problems of government legitimacy and accountability. Therefore, we discussed offering them an analysis to restructure the entire deal. We dislike the paper - so we would concentrate on the process.

We discussed such issues as justification, improved environmental management, accountability, retention of federal responsibilities, Aboriginal participation and stakeholder involvement. Some of the problems we had were lack of enforcement, gaps in environmental protection, and access to information, lack of accountability, and lack of public rights and remedies. It was agreed there must be more financial resources for environmental protection, not less. There must be forums to identify priorities and co-ordinate strategy development and action planning. There must also be good public reporting, and public participation on committees and task groups, as appropriate. As to the Accord being a binding agreement, one government cannot force another but there would be a Statement of Intent. Many questions are unanswered.

We agreed it was extremely important to lobby our own provincial governments and certainly the Harmonization Working Group in New Brunswick has been doing this. The Provincial Deputy Ministers of Environment were to meet in Winnipeg on October 17, but to date we have received no information from DOE. The Position Paper which our group worked on is has just now been released .

I would encourage everyone to become well informed on this subject so that we can ensure the public understands there is another matter of harmonization other than that of the federal and provincial taxes.
