

Canadian Business and Biodiversity Council 2012 Workshop Summary

The second annual workshop of the Canadian Business & Biodiversity Council (CBBC) was held at the Royal Brock Hotel, Guelph, Ontario, on December 5, 2012. It was attended by 75 participants from business, government, ENGO and academia. The purpose of the workshop was to identify and discuss a range of conservation issues and solutions in a Canadian business context. The purpose was fulfilled through a series of 26 keynote and expert presentations and discussions, including 17 in concurrent sessions. Luc Robitaille presided over the event for the Council. Luc is Corporate Director, Environment, Holcim (Canada), Inc. and Chairs the Board of the Council.

A highlight of the 2012 workshop was enabled by its proximity to the Biodiversity Institute of Ontario at the University of Guelph, which is conducting ground-breaking global research into facilitating species identification and cataloguing through bar-coding methodology. Workshop participants were treated to a reception and tour of the facilities hosted by the Institute at the end of the afternoon.

Plenary sessions of the event heard high-level business perspectives on corporate biodiversity conservation, clearly articulating the business case in both the domestic and international (supply chain) contexts. In Sobeys example, businesses are recognising the importance to them of resource scarcity; they are recognising the importance of internalising costs which have been considered external, and they are starting to use such terms as “radical transparency” to describe their business communications policies. Unilever’s example shows a commitment to halving the environmental footprint of its products and to sourcing all its global agricultural requirements sustainably by the year 2020.

Participants also heard about the results of the recent international business-related discussions and decisions of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, where importance continues to be placed on communicating the messages of the economic importance of biodiversity and the importance of sharing best conservation practices among businesses to accelerate progress in this area. A global Partnership for Business and Biodiversity is evolving under the Convention and will hold its 3rd international meeting in Canada in 2013.

Environment Canada’s key presentation emphasised the importance to Canada of strong and effective national attention to biodiversity conservation. Following the lead of the Aichi targets agreed by Convention parties, Canada has, with stakeholder input, established 4 goals and 17 conservation targets to be achieved by 2020. In this context, it was emphasised that leadership from the private sector will be critical to the achievement of these targets.

Geoff Munro of Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), in his capacity as Chair of the Federal Biodiversity Information Partnership (FBIP), spoke of the importance to business of reliable biodiversity data and the fragmented, inaccessible and incomplete status of such data in Canada. He emphasized the importance of restoring it to usability and the role FBIP plans to play in that effort through the Federal Committee on Geomatics and Earth Observation and through leadership in the establishment of the Federal Geospatial Platform. An important element in this effort will be the creation of a national institute for biodiversity information over the next 5 years, in which Canadian business interests will be invited to participate.

Martin Sneary, speaking for the International Union for Conservation of Nature, focused on the need for business to make informed evaluations of biodiversity impacts, with emphasis on species, habitat and protected areas, as well as the indicators of the Global Reporting Initiative. He also pointed to the growing importance of business integrating the cost of ecosystem services into their accounting practices.

Dr. Blair Feltmate, Chair, Climate Change Adaptation Project (Canada), provided the luncheon address, enabling the workshop to focus on climate change as one of the most significant threats to Canadian biodiversity. His report, released in June of 2012, identified the 5 priority adaptation sectors for Canada: city infrastructure, biodiversity, fresh water, First Nations and agriculture. A key message was not to look for modelling perfection, but to 'get on with it'.

If you have any questions, would like to become a member or become involved in any way please do not hesitate to contact the Council at (613) 203-0063 or email at reg.melanson@businessbiodiversity.ca.