

Better management of climate change initiatives needed

WINNIPEG – Manitoba Auditor General Norm Ricard today released his report *Managing Climate Change*. The audit examined whether the Department of Sustainable Development (the Department) was adequately leading the province's response to climate change. This is a follow up to the Auditor General's 2010 report on managing climate change.

"Our audit found that there continue to be several gaps in the planning, monitoring and reporting processes for climate change initiatives," said Ricard.

The Auditor General noted that while the Department was aware by the fall of 2009 that the greenhouse gas reduction target in its 2008 plan would not be met, it did not update the plan until December 2015. Further, the audit found the 2015 emissions reduction plan was not supported by comprehensive analyses of the benefits, risks and costs of different approaches and policy tools. The plan also lacked implementation details, expected emissions reductions for specific initiatives, and estimated costs.

"A plan should clearly indicate how overall emission reduction targets will be met – that is, how each significant initiative will contribute to the targeted reduction. The 2015 plan did not do this," said Ricard.

The Auditor General noted the 2015 plan was short-lived. Following the April 2016 provincial election, government announced it was developing a new plan. This plan has not yet been released.

The audit also found that progress monitoring was weak. Roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined, there was no regular monitoring and reporting on whether the climate change project was on time, on budget, and going to achieve its stated goals, and there was no ongoing risk management process to identify and mitigate the project's risks. "Without adequate plans, targets and suitable monitoring processes, the likelihood of success in reducing emissions is greatly reduced," says Ricard.

The Auditor General noted that the 2011 and 2013 public reports on greenhouse gas emissions reductions mostly complied with legislation. The report notes, however, that legislation does not require annual reporting of results or reporting the cost of reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. "Reporting annually on the results achieved and on the associated costs would keep both the Assembly and the public better informed on this important issue," says Ricard.

The audit found that the Department has been working since 2011 to identify and assess the risks associated with climate change impacts in Manitoba. "This work needs to be completed so the Province can prioritize identified risks, assess the potential impacts to government services, programs and resources, and develop a provincial adaptation plan," says Ricard.

The report noted government departments and agencies are generally aware of potential climate change impacts (such as increased severe weather events) and are beginning to plan for them on their own. “A more coordinated response is needed to ensure that risks with the greatest overall impacts on government services, programs and resources are prioritized and managed accordingly,” Ricard says. The report notes that there has been little public reporting on the progress in adapting to climate change impacts.

The audit includes eight recommendations. The report is part of a collaborative initiative involving the Office of the Auditor General of Canada and most provincial legislative offices. A summary report is expected to be issued in early 2018.

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For more information contact:	Frank Landry, Communications Manager frank.landry@oag.mb.ca 204-979-4936
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