

ACCESS, OPENNESS, ACCOUNTABILITY:

How the *Lobbyists Registration Act* and the Registry were Developed

In developing the *Lobbyist Registration Act* and the *Newfoundland and Labrador Registry of Lobbyists*, government did a great deal of research. A review of similar legislation and registries in other Canadian jurisdictions was followed up by a consultation seeking the input of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The Department of Justice developed a discussion document that outlined potential key elements of lobbyist legislation; it was posted to government's Web site and advertised in the province's major newspapers. It was mailed directly to more than 100 organizations, including volunteer groups and industry associations, for review and input.

The response included numerous telephone calls and some 20 written submissions from advocacy groups throughout the province.

The range of submissions reflects the great diversity of interests and concerns within Newfoundland and Labrador. However, four key themes very quickly emerged:

- Most respondents agreed that lobbying is a good and useful tool in the democratic process.
- However, some drew a distinction between those who lobby for a not-for-profit organization or on social issues and those who are paid to lobby on behalf of a commercial enterprise. Many felt that the latter should be regulated and the former not.
- Many respondents were concerned that registration would impose too great an administrative or financial burden, especially on non-profit organizations operating on a shoestring budget, and cautioned government to design the process and the fee structure so as not to create barriers based on cost.
- Finally, all respondents agreed that transparency around lobbying is a good public policy goal. There was a strong feeling that information should be publicly available on individuals or groups seeking to influence how government collects and spends public funds, or to change the law under which we live.

Government is very appreciative of this input, which helped to refine the *Lobbyist Registration Act* and guide the design of the Registry. The information and the perspectives brought forward were very valuable in helping government develop legislation and a lobbyists' registry that not only leads the country, but also is appropriate to this province.