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**EI Evaluation Studies:
Corporate Review and Recommendations**

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OVERVIEW

Report for Daily on 15 Studies Review (Employment Insurance)

At Management Daily on September 9, 1999, Evaluation and Data Development (EDD) was asked to initiate an internal review of 15 commissioned evaluation studies looking at the EI insurance benefit reforms.

The review group was tasked with four specific questions:

1. Does the Department agree with the findings? If not, why not? Are the findings or conclusions well grounded?
2. What are the policy implications?
3. What clarifications are needed?
4. What is the recommended management strategy for the release of these studies, including the appropriate communications plan?

The Committee process

A committee was convened and included representatives from Labour Market Policy, Strategic Communications, Insurance Communications, ADMO Strategic Policy, Women's Bureau, Insurance Policy, and EDD. Thirteen of the 15 studies (two studies have not yet been received) were reviewed. Of these, 11 are recommended for release as part of the EI impact evaluation process while 2 are to be released as more general evaluations of insurance benefits.

Overall, there are many important messages about the incremental impacts of EI showing that the EI reform policy is producing results as intended. The generally positive findings are tempered by the recognition that the effects are different for different sub-groups (women, youth, low-income groups).

2. (1) (b)

Each member of the committee has spent many hours reviewing the studies' substance, methodology, findings, conclusions, wording and presentation. Written marginal comments will be consolidated with EDD's line edits and will be forwarded to the authors with an indication of the need to finalize reports for public release within specified time frames.

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Bearing in mind their technical nature, the quality of academic writing is fair to good in most reports. That being said, the committee has suggested editing to replace some technical terminology that may not seem value-free in popular discussion (e.g. EI tax, winners-losers, regressive, inequitable, etc.). EDD will approach the authors to ask them, where possible, to rewrite certain paragraphs using more neutral language. The few reports that are difficult to read may reflect some question of writing in a second language.

The development of a plain language evaluation brief for each study will help to contextualize the EI change being evaluated and communicate the findings and policy implications in a more straightforward way. One-page summaries of each study's findings will be drafted by November 1999 for review by the committee. These will subsequently be expanded to the 4-page evaluation briefs that normally accompany evaluation studies.

Linkage with Monitoring and Assessment Report (M&A)

By law, the Commissioners must report to the Minister on the impact of changes in the system by December 31 of each year from 1997 to 2001. In addition, the Minister must lay the report before Parliament within 30 sitting days. For the 1998 report, this meant that the report was tabled during the month of March 1999.

The departmental timetable for the current 3rd annual M&A report calls for final updates to the report to be completed by mid-November with the final report (in both languages) going to the Commission on November 24. Sign-off is expected during the week of November 29 with submission to the Minister by December 10, 1999.

The Committee reviewing the EI evaluation studies was conscious of the interplay between the evaluation studies and the M&A report. The first report in 1997 specifically referred to the evaluation work (p. 61) as another important future source of evidence that would contribute to a better understanding of EI impacts. Bearing in mind that the evaluation studies are part of the larger monitoring and assessment of the EI reforms, the Committee discussed how best to relate the two. **The committee recommends that brief references be made to the 13 studies (2 to 3 sentences maximum) in the M&A report where such references are relevant.**

The Audit and Evaluation Committee will review the evaluation studies in the usual fashion. A meeting of this committee is scheduled for December 13 for this purpose.

S. 21 (1/16)

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S. 21(1)(b)

In answer to the first three questions posed at Daily, it should be noted that the studies are technical and challenging to interpret by readers unaccustomed to econometric analyses. Like all such studies, misinterpretation or phrases taken out of context or common words used in a technical way, could be used by critical media or by Opposition Parties to reinforce negative views about the impact of the EI reform or of the Department's assessment of the impacts of the reform in the Monitoring and Assessment reports. However, given that the Department has positioned EI reform as something which is being assessed and which might require adjustment, our communications experts assure us that this type of questioning can be handled within the existing overall communications approach.

Next steps and timing

S. 21(1)(a)
and 21(1)(b)

In such a scenario, the studies would be posted on the Department's web site (www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/edd), as they become available in final form (not before the end of the calendar year). To expedite the release of the reports, we will post the finalized reports on the Departmental web site, and each study will be accompanied by an evaluation brief (written by the Department). Questions and Answers, QP cards and media lines would be prepared for each study and a departmental spokesperson would be identified.

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