and Photometric Units Act defined the units of electrical measure and the units of photometric measure. However, the legalization of the metric system did not lead to its extensive use in industry or trade. Metric units had been used to some extent in the photographic, optical, sports, electrical and pharmaceutical fields for many years.

The question of metric conversion for Canada came increasingly to the fore in the late 1960s after the British decision in 1965 to abandon the imperial system in favour of the metric. Representations had been pressed upon the government, in varying degrees of urgency, from such widely diverse segments of the nation as the Consumers' Association of Canada, the Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation, the Agricultural Institute of Canada, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Canadian Pharmaceutical Association, the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers, the Chemical Institute of Canada, the Engineering Institute of Canada, the Canadian Hospital Association and the Canadian Construction Association. These concerned and broadly representative groups of citizens had realized the logic of conversion in an almost totally metric world. They had become convinced of the practical benefits to be derived from this system in competitive world markets.

Consequently an Interdepartmental Committee on the International System of Units was established in January 1968 by the government to study the matter. By its terms of reference it was to organize studies with regard to the applicability of SI in Canada, examine and report on any apparent need for action by government to assist in the adoption of SI, consider the adequacy of communication and information in the public and private sectors on all aspects of the subject, and encourage liaison and coordination of activities in the field of conversion within existing departments and agencies. The committee possessed information on the experience of other countries that were in the process of metric conversion as well as a report of studies undertaken by the Canadian Standards Association. Although it held no public hearings, it made an in-depth study of the present and proposed use of the metric system and considered the views and resolutions of professional, industrial and consumer organizations. It also examined the implications of metric conversion for the consumer, for education and for industry and trade.

White paper on metric conversion

The committee's report in mid-1969 led to the tabling in the House of Commons of the white paper on metric conversion on January 16, 1970 urging conversion to the metric system.

In it the government accepted its leadership responsibility in planning for the processes of change. Realizing the need for a transitional period, the government would propose arrangements for the division of responsibilities in the public and private sectors for studies, planning, consultation and organization of a coordinated approach. The process of change would be initiated within departments of the government itself. Public education as to the objectives and timing of conversion would be an endeavour of prime importance. Liaison with provincial and territorial governments would be initiated and maintained.

In order to initiate metric conversion in Canada the principal actions proposed were the establishment of a full-time metric commission to advise upon and coordinate overall planning and the assignment of responsibility to the projected Standards Council of Canada to develop standards for conversion in industry.

Establishment of Metric Commission Canada

To implement the policy set out in the white paper, the Metric Commission was created by order-in-council in June 1971 for the purpose of advising the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce on plans for conversion. To this end the commission initiated studies relating to the implications for the Canadian economy; prepared, in wide consultation, an overall program for conversion; and disseminated information