

Declaration

OF THE NATIONAL FORUM ON CLIMATE CHANGE

We, the members of the National Forum on Climate Change, believe that climate change will touch the life of every Canadian. Decisions taken today on this complex and controversial issue will have implications for our communities, our children, and future generations. Climate change, caused by a buildup of greenhouse gases, could lead to dramatic changes in sea levels, storm patterns, and average temperatures. Every Canadian has a role to play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The time for action is now.

On the balance of evidence, and in the face of uncertainty, we have concluded that there are two compelling reasons to take immediate action on climate change:

- ◆ If the challenge is as serious as many scientists believe, an effective response will call for major shifts in North Americans' attitudes and lifestyle, and will lead to dramatic adjustments in the global economy. Early action will allow us to create momentum for the difficult adjustments that may be necessary in the years ahead.
- ◆ If concerns about climate change turn out to be premature or overstated, there will be time and opportunity to adjust our response. In the meantime, Canadians will have taken out a measure of insurance, and will reap important side-benefits as a result of early action. These benefits will include reduced pollution, better urban air quality, a more efficient economy, and job creation resulting from the introduction of new technologies.

Canadians have little to lose and everything to gain by taking action immediately. Each of us can and must make a difference.

About the National Forum

The National Forum on Climate Change was sponsored by the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy to raise public awareness of the climate change issue and to bring a citizens' viewpoint to the debate. The Forum met in February, March and April 1998.

Most of us came to this process knowing little or nothing about climate change, beyond what we had learned from newspapers, radio or television. Our only obvious link to each other was that we had each received the Order of Canada (or, in one case, an equivalent honour). We came to the Forum from all parts of Canada.

Some of us suspected from the outset that climate change was a serious problem, while others were more sceptical. We all came with an open mind, a willingness to test the conventional wisdom, and a solid commitment to arriving at a responsible opinion on climate change. When we first met in February 1998, we all agreed that we had not come to the Forum to rubber stamp a predetermined policy. We believe this is the same attitude our fellow citizens would have brought to the issue.

The National Forum on Climate Change was a unique process, and we were all pleased and honoured to take part. Never before had Order of Canada recipients been called together to address a national policy issue in this way. We believe this Declaration captures the conclusions that other Canadians would have reached, if they had had the same opportunity to review the evidence. It is our hope that the Declaration will mark the beginning, not the end, of public discussion on this urgent issue.

National Round Table
on the Environment
and the Economy

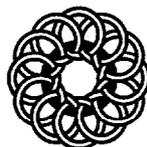


Table ronde nationale
sur l'environnement
et l'économie

June 3, 1998

What Is Climate Change?

Climate change science suggests that average temperatures around the world will fluctuate as a result of an increase in the greenhouse effect. This natural process has always been with us, trapping a portion of the sun's energy in the atmosphere. If not for the greenhouse effect, today's average temperatures would be lower by about 30°C, and the earth would be uninhabitable. The greenhouse effect is caused by greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and methane, and by water vapour in the atmosphere, which act much like the glass that holds the heat inside a greenhouse.

The rate of climate change has recently accelerated, and many scientists believe that human activity is the cause. Human activity only accounts for 4% of all greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, but this total has been sufficient to raise the earth's average temperature by 0.3-0.6°C over the past century. Most of the increase has occurred in the past 40 years, and greenhouse gas concentrations are expected to double by the year 2100 unless there is a drastic change in world consumption patterns. The majority of scientists believe this doubling will lead to an increase in average temperatures of 1.5-4.5°C. Average temperature changes of this magnitude have been associated with major climatic changes such as the last Ice Age.

Since the Industrial Revolution in the early 19th century, the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by about 30%, largely because of the use of coal, oil, and natural gas – the fossil fuels. Clearcutting of forests has also had an impact, since trees and other vegetation absorb carbon dioxide that would otherwise stay in the atmosphere.

Climate change due to greenhouse gases should not be confused with the depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, or smog problems in cities across Canada and around the world.

The Potential Impact

In some parts of Canada, climate change could bring local benefits, such as a longer growing season. However, most of the impacts are expected to be negative:

- ◆ Major storms might become more frequent and severe. There is no scientific evidence to link a specific weather event to increased greenhouse gas emissions. However, the 1996 flood of the Saguenay River in Quebec, the 1997 flood of the Red River in Manitoba, and the 1998 ice storm in Eastern Canada, are examples of what the future could hold.
- ◆ Studies indicate that the Mackenzie Basin has experienced a warming trend of 1.5°C this century. Communities in the North are already seeing environmental changes such as melting permafrost and lower lake levels. These changes will have an impact on the ecology of the region and the traditional way of life of Indigenous peoples.
- ◆ Summer heat waves might become longer and more severe. If they do, seniors, children, and people with respiratory problems will be at higher risk. Public health systems will have to adjust in order to cope with events of this type.
- ◆ Patterns of rainfall may shift across Canada. Changes in the distribution of snowfall in the Rocky Mountains may lead to droughts on the prairies, while water at the Lake St. Clair shoreline could recede by one to six kilometres, with serious impacts for wetlands and wildlife. Higher temperatures and evaporation rates would also reduce the amount of water available to dilute pollutants entering the Great Lakes.
- ◆ Since oceans will expand, low-lying coastal communities could be flooded and seawater could encroach on fresh water supplies. Outside Canada, more than 40 small island countries could disappear as a result of rising sea levels. Millions of people would become environmental refugees.

Action Has Its Costs...and Benefits

There is a great deal of debate about the costs and benefits of taking action on climate change.

- ◆ We have heard that in a worst-case scenario, reductions in fossil fuel consumption could have a serious impact on energy producers and users. Thousands of jobs could be lost, and some single-industry towns could shut down. Canada is a major producer, consumer, and exporter of fossil fuels.



- ◆ At the same time, climate change action could lead to a range of new economic opportunities. Canada could become a major exporter of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies, many of which are already competitive with conventional energy forms.
- ◆ Sustainable forestry is an important focus, since forests play a key role in storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- ◆ Action on greenhouse gas emissions would mean better air quality and more green space for many citizens.

Coping with Uncertainty

There is considerable scientific agreement on the subject of climate change. Still, Canadians need to know that there are experts who disagree on the potential environmental implications of climate change, while economists disagree on the costs of addressing the problem. Forum members were concerned about limitations in the computer models that predict the seriousness of climate change and the cost of climate change action. Many of these questions may be answered over the next seven to 10 years, but we believe there are solid reasons to address the climate change challenge now, despite scientific and economic uncertainty:

- ◆ Scientific issues can be the subject of intense, prolonged controversy. Sceptical voices could be correct and must continue to be heard. However, ongoing debate is no excuse for inaction. At the moment, a large number of scientists believe that climate change will have a major impact on the global environment and economy.
- ◆ The developing world is expected to produce half of the human-generated greenhouse gases in the world by 2010. Emerging economies like China and India cannot be expected to reduce their emissions until they see industrialized countries take serious action on a problem that was caused, after all, by increased fossil fuel use in the industrialized nations.

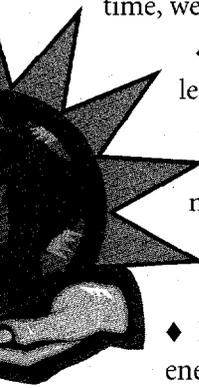
At the Kyoto Summit on Climate Change in December 1997, industrialized countries set targets for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by 2010. Canada promised to cut greenhouse gases by 6% below 1990 levels. However, Canadian emissions have been rising since 1990, so the Kyoto commitment really means a 20-25% reduction in our expected output by 2010.

Although the Kyoto targets are ambitious, they may by themselves have little impact on the drastic problem predicted by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) scientists. If the IPCC predictions are true, the Kyoto agreement is a crucial first effort to move the global economy in the right direction, encourage commitments on the part of developing countries, and capture the attention of every citizen on the planet. Many immediate steps can and should be taken to respond to our Kyoto commitment. However, action to fully meet the terms of the agreement should be taken after thorough economic cost analysis and should be coupled with policies that address any negative impacts on Canadian communities.

Taking Action

Canada's response to climate change will require urgent action on the part of governments and industry. At the same time, we must each make a personal commitment – to our communities, our children, and future generations.

- ◆ As citizens, we all have the ability and the obligation to address the issue in our day-to-day lives. We must learn to save energy at home and at work, use our cars less, ride bicycles or public transit, recycle materials, and reduce our consumption of fresh water. As consumers, we can think twice about buying things we don't really need, and look for local products that can be produced and shipped with less energy. As members of community associations, service clubs, or other voluntary groups, we can encourage friends and associates to learn more about climate change and take action in their own lives. In a spiritual sense, we can each find our own way of reconnecting with the earth.
- ◆ Industries must take every opportunity to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and increase the energy efficiency of their day-to-day operations.



- ◆ Municipalities can provide the infrastructure for individual action by supporting public transit, building bike paths, funding blue box programs, planting trees, installing energy-efficient lighting, building energy efficiency into local building codes, and designing communities to reduce commuting distances. Municipal governments can also help build public awareness by distributing information on the simple things people can do to make a difference on climate change.
- ◆ The Forum was particularly impressed with initiatives like the Toronto Atmospheric Fund (TAF) and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' 20% Club, both of which address the climate change challenge at the community level. Municipalities should learn more about TAF, which uses a revolving loan fund to finance community projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or promote the use of energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies.
- ◆ Federal, provincial and territorial governments must look beyond their own jurisdictional interests to find ways of collaborating on climate change. Governments can support local action by establishing a National Atmospheric Fund, to provide seed money for climate change research, education and action. Governments should use market-based measures, where possible, to encourage greenhouse gas reductions.
- ◆ At first, an effective response to climate change will likely mean higher energy costs for Canadians. Over time, we should all be prepared to adopt energy efficiency measures and increase our reliance on renewable energy sources, to help reduce the country's energy spending. If there is an increase in government revenue from higher energy costs, this revenue must be used to reduce the impact of climate change measures on affected communities, groups, and individuals, or to support the development of new energy technologies.

Action on climate change is beginning now. Members of the National Forum on Climate Change intend to remain informed and active on this vitally important issue. We hope every Canadian will join us.

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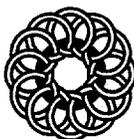


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