



Territorial Premiers discuss plans to create strong sustainable North

YELLOWKNIFE, NT (August 31, 2017) – Premiers of Canada’s three northern territories met in Yellowknife this week to discuss how they are working together to ensure that northerners have increasing opportunities including good jobs close to home and sustainable communities.

Premiers spoke at length about indigenous cooperation and their support for reconciliation and partnership. Our modern land claim and self-government agreements are examples of positive change.

Responsible, sustainable development and economic diversification are keys to enhancing prosperity and wellness in remote communities by creating jobs and facilitating reconciliation for all territorial residents.

Canada’s three territories are optimistic about the future, and are actively working to balance environmental preservation and economic development to achieve wellness and prosperity throughout our communities. Investment in economic infrastructure, people, and sustainable communities are critical steps in ensuring that territorial residents thrive socially, economically and are contributing members of the Canadian federation.

Dissolution of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

The federal government’s recent announcement regarding the dissolution of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and creation of two new departments is an opportunity to improve not only the relationship with Indigenous peoples, but also with northern governments. Twenty years ago, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) noted that “the North is the part of Canada in which Aboriginal people have achieved the most in terms of political influence and institutions appropriate to their cultures and needs.”

RCAP goes on, however, to note that “the North itself is a region with little influence over its own destiny. Most of the levers of political and economic power continue to be held outside the North and, in some cases, outside Canada.” Twenty years later, northerners are still being left out of decisions that affect their land, communities and families. Premiers see this reorganization as an opportunity to honour the intent of devolution agreements, including moving decision-making affecting the North out of the new department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs and into the hands of northern governments, and the ultimate dissolution of the Northern Affairs program.

Northwest Territories and Yukon support the timely completion of Nunavut’s devolution agreement with the Government of Canada and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated.

Strengthening Relationships with Indigenous People

Northern Premiers recognize the importance of meaningful engagement with Canada’s Indigenous peoples. They are supportive of a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples in Canada, and the need to move forward with the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Premiers spoke about the strengths of delivering services in an integrated, non-reserve system, and the need to better communicate with other governments and Canadians about how northern communities are governed and deliver programs and services. It is important that Indigenous groups are supported and funded to make positive change. Premiers emphasize the need for this to be done without fragmenting existing budgets or levels of services to Indigenous northerners. RCAP also spoke to the need for “future arrangements to allocate clear responsibilities between Aboriginal nation governments and territorial institutions and be kept simple and focused, given the high cost of government across a widely dispersed population.” Recognition of existing self-government agreements is fundamental.

Premiers support Indigenous self-determination, and reinforce the need for territorial governments and Indigenous governments and organizations to be engaged in any federal planning processes that could affect the delivery of programs and services to northern residents.

Climate Change

While the North experiences the negative impacts of climate change first-hand, territorial Premiers are working together to advance common climate change priorities. As a result of their collaboration, Northern Premiers were successful in having the

unique circumstances of the North reflected in the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change.

Northern Premiers are committed to working with federal and provincial governments, Indigenous peoples and other partners, on implementing the Pan-Canadian Framework and ensuring long-term climate change resilience and adaptation in the North.

A key commitment under the framework is developing a Northern Adaptation Strategy. Northern Premiers emphasized that they anticipate the territories to be fully engaged in developing the Northern Adaptation Strategy and that they look forward to working with the federal government on this initiative.

Northern Premiers appreciate federal climate and green infrastructure funding announcements to date. They call on the federal government to provide clarity with regards to how funding will be applied in the territories. Additional capital and other resources are required to address the territories' infrastructure gap, including significant investment in better climate monitoring, resilient infrastructure and clean energy.

Carbon Pricing

Carbon pricing should be a valuable tool in reducing emissions and providing incentives to green energy alternatives. In most of the North alternatives are limited or non-existent. Special accommodations are required in northern regions to address this. Premiers reiterate that a carbon tax must be designed in a way that does not negatively impact northern costs of living, undermine food security or threaten emerging economies. Northern Premiers are concerned that carbon pricing cannot be another economic barrier to development.

Infrastructure

As the North grapples with the effects of climate change, key infrastructure investments will help to address our immediate and ongoing need to adapt to changes in our environment and landscape that are affecting both the health and prosperity of northerners.

Strategic investments in trade and transportation infrastructure will improve residents' access to jobs and economic opportunities and a range of essential goods and services such as affordable, healthy food, health care, education and skills training.

Premiers are seeking northern representation on the Canada Infrastructure Bank board of directors to ensure northern realities are understood. Given the small populations and

vast distances in the North, the federal government is an essential and valued partner in infrastructure investments. Federal programs need to take into consideration the unique nature of Northern Canada when managing major infrastructure projects. It is essential to recognize the complexities around construction seasons, project management, labour shortages and construction methods and designs while navigating a changing climate. Territories are appreciative of the 75/25 cost-sharing with the federal government for their infrastructure contributions. However, funding agreements for much-needed major projects to address the North's infrastructure deficit should provide flexibility for current capital budgets of the three territories.

Arctic Policy Framework

Northern Premiers discussed the importance of the federal government's Arctic Policy Framework (APF) in developing both strong northern communities and developing viable and diversified northern economies. Sustainable resource development is a priority of Northern Premiers and must be the foundation of the APF. Premiers will not be a part of any policy framework that does not enhance the economic future for the territories.

Managing our Resources

Northern Premiers reiterate our desire to be engaged in decision-making processes that involve the North and avoid unilateral decision-making, such as the Canada-US Joint Leadership Statement, which imposed a moratorium on new offshore petroleum licensing in the Canadian Arctic without any prior consultation.

All three territories have processes in place for the development of land use plans, and each territory has rigorous regulatory regimes that work in collaboration with Indigenous governments and organizations.

Northern Premiers appreciate the federal government's interest in improving the *Oceans Act* and the *Canada Petroleum Resources Act*, and recognize the increase in federal oceans protection commitment by 2020. However, the proposed amendments to the *Oceans Act* and the *Canada Petroleum Resources Act* included in Bill C55 allow for the creation of Interim Marine Protected Areas by a federal minister without prior consultation. This amendment should not be part of Bill C55.

Premier Taptuna confirmed that Nunavut will host the 2018 Northern Premiers' Forum.

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