

Pan-northern leaders' statement on climate change

Canada's North is warming up three to four times faster than the global average. We are witness to the ways climate change has and continues to significantly impact our communities, the natural environment and the wellbeing of our residents. Action on climate change is a key priority for northern leaders and we call on the federal government to increase its investments in climate change adaptation and clean energy across the territories. We also call upon the federal government to recognize the importance of reconciliation through climate change actions by supporting Indigenous-led approaches, including Indigenous governments in decision-making, and the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge wherever possible.

Climate change has led to growing concerns about food security, health and wellbeing of residents, public safety, the resilience of infrastructure and preservation of cultural identity in the North.

While the far-reaching impacts of climate change in the North are disproportionate to the small contribution the territories make to greenhouse gas emissions on a national and global scale, we are doing our part to reduce emissions and support the transition to a lower carbon economy.

However, climate change cannot be confronted by our governments alone. Partnership and collaboration are crucial to respond to these challenges. As Northern leaders, we are issuing a call for increased federal attention, support and investment in seven key areas:

- **Climate-resilient infrastructure:** Building, upgrading, maintaining and monitoring infrastructure to withstand climate change risks and meet energy efficiency standards will support the continued safety and resiliency of our communities and economies.
- **Renewable and alternative secure energy systems:** Many communities in the territories remain heavily reliant on fossil fuels for heat, power and transportation. As demand for energy grows, support for cleaner regional and community-based energy supply and generation through renewable sources such as hydroelectricity, biomass, wind, solar, geothermal and alternative sources such as natural gas will help reduce our carbon footprint and offer greater energy independence and security. Energy efficiency and storage will also be key in this transition toward decarbonisation.
- **Emergency preparedness:** Northern governments must be equipped to prepare for, predict and respond to climate change hazards such as an

increase in floods, forest fires, extreme weather events, erosion along rivers and the Arctic coasts, unpredictable ice conditions, pandemics and permafrost thaw. Ensuring appropriate measures are in place to keep people and their communities safe is critical.

- **Northern research, knowledge and capacity building:** To better understand and anticipate the long-term and complex impacts of climate change, we need research that is based in the North and inclusive of northerners to build capacity for both today as well as for future generations. The research should be informed by scientific knowledge and, just as importantly, by Indigenous knowledge from northerners who have a long and close relationship with the environment. This knowledge is used to inform climate change adaptation and mitigation decision making and enhances scientific research. This could be achieved in part through the establishment of a Northern Climate Hub.
- **Supporting health and wellness:** The direct and indirect impacts of climate change have far-reaching implications on the livelihoods, food security and the emotional, physical mental and spiritual health of northerners. Initiatives that integrate education, health, food security, language and cultural practices with climate actions, particularly those delivered on-the-land, will not only achieve that resiliency but also build youth capacity, promote youth-Elder knowledge exchange, support sustainable economies and develop community-based climate monitoring capacity.
- **Preservation of cultural identity:** Climate change is creating increased barriers to accessing the land and unprecedented changes to the distribution of flora and fauna. To preserve Indigenous knowledge and cultural identity, more support is required for Indigenous communities and harvesters to ensure safe access to the land, as well as support for storing, preparing and distributing country foods within communities. Naturally, self-sustaining wildlife populations that remain available for cultural purposes should be a principal objective.
- **Economic and leadership opportunities:** With adequate resources, the territories can enhance their position as leaders in responding to climate change impacts. We can provide Canada and the world with a range of knowledge and expertise. Northern governments also recognize that the changing climate will open new doors like agriculture opportunities, an increase in tourism and commercial shipping. Seizing on opportunities and mitigating negative repercussions will require long-term and strategic investment in community capacity and sustainable business development.

We must also continue to support traditional economies to adapt during these precarious and unsettling times.

As an immediate step, we are requesting that the federal government establish, extend and expand federal funding programs and opportunities that support climate change mitigation and adaptation, clean energy and monitoring across the territories, including specific and easily accessible funding for on-the-land programs and community-based harvesting activities. These funding programs are essential not only for territorial governments but also Indigenous and municipal governments.

Stable, long-term funding for northern governments must account for the limited fiscal and human capacity across the three territories and the logistical challenges of working across vast and remote areas. Government partnerships, such as the Pan-Territorial Adaptation Partnership, provide important mechanisms for identifying and realizing tangible outcomes.

While a strong and prosperous North benefits all Canadians, our potential cannot be realized without focused action to address the immense challenges posed by climate change. The time to act is now. Lessons learned from climate action in the North will be valuable elsewhere across the global north and south in the years to come and will be of great benefit to future generations. As the federal government considers how to “build back better” from the economic crisis driven by COVID-19, northern leaders call for strategic investments in climate change adaptation and clean energy that can help achieve our shared goals to reduce emissions, strengthen the resilience of our communities and grow a sustainable economy.