

**Climate Leaders Summit  
Opening Remarks  
Minister Michael McLeod  
January 16, 2006**

Chiefs, Mayors, Elders, community representatives, many of you have traveled from your communities, from our neighbouring territories or southern Canada to join us. It is good to see so many people gathered to discuss this important issue.

Climate change is a complex problem. In the North, everybody can feel that the climate is changing. We are seeing impacts from these changes and we know we have to adapt to them..

Even though everybody agrees that we have to adapt to climate change impacts, I don't think anybody clearly knows what that means. That is why this meeting is important. The discussions you will be having over these two days will help all of us to get a better understanding of what we mean when we talk about climate change impacts and adaptation.

We know that the North is changing. By that I mean many changes, not just climate changes. There are people in this room today who were born on the land. The North was very different then. Technology, economic development, transportation and communication have changed the North and made it a very different place than it was even a few decades ago.

For many of these changes we make plans. We plan our airports, our highways, and our telephone and Internet systems. We plan our economic developments so we can get the most benefits out of them. All sectors of society including government spend a lot of time preparing plans.

We are also constantly adapting to changes. Sometimes we end up reacting to these changes as they happen. We run for shelter if it starts to rain. We take action when more serious events like spring floods or forest fires threaten our communities.

If we are going to adapt to climate change impacts then we are going to need to start planning for these changes especially when there is a risk of serious consequences.

What kinds of changes should we expect? What impacts will those changes cause? These are the questions we must ask ourselves.

Some impacts from climate change are already obvious. We are making repairs to highways and buildings because the permafrost underneath them is melting and we are adapting the way we build on top of permafrost. We have changed the way we construct winter roads. We pay a lot more attention to scheduling movements of freight because the cold winter season is getting shorter.

What other types of impacts should we expect? At this meeting, those of you gathered in this room will be able to discuss these impacts.

We don't have is perfect information about how our climate will change.

Scientists are projecting that the North will be warmer in the coming decades.

They expect there will be more warming in winters than in summers. What they can't tell us yet is what kinds of changes to expect in precipitation. Will we get more rain in the summers? More snow in the winters?

We have some clues about how to look at this problem. Our climate has always been somewhat unpredictable. Some years we have nice summers, other years not so nice. We have seen the kinds of climate events that can cause us problems. Freezing rain in winter can pull down our power lines. Heavy, wet snowfalls can cause our roofs to collapse.

What kinds of things can be affected by climate change? What is vulnerable to climate change impacts in the NWT? What is the risk from these vulnerabilities? Collapsing roofs are very dangerous situations. Should we over-build the load bearing capacity of all our roofs just in case snowfalls get heavier?

What will happen to the natural environment, the plants, animals and fish? Are there things that we can do to minimize effects on them as they adapt to changes in the climate?

These are important questions we need to discuss. As I said earlier, nobody has a clear idea of what it means to adapt to climate change impacts. This is not just true in the North, this is true around the world. Because climate change impacts are being felt earlier in the North than in the rest of the world, we don't have a lot of good examples from other places to help with our problem. Instead, other people in Canada and the world will be looking to us for examples of how to adapt.

In 2001, the Government of the Northwest Territories released the NWT Greenhouse Gas Strategy. That Strategy is about reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases that cause climate change. At the end of that Strategy it is recognized that impacts and adaptation would be more important in the future. I don't think anybody realized at that time how quickly that would happen. Impacts and adaptation have become very important in 2007.

Our Government will be releasing a revised NWT Greenhouse Gas Strategy in the next few months. I can tell you now that the revised Strategy will place much greater emphasis on the need to respond to climate change impacts. As soon as the Greenhouse Gas Strategy is released, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources will begin preparing an Impacts and Adaptation Plan.

The discussions that you have today and tomorrow are very important work that we are listening to, the rest of the world is watching. Work hard.

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