
Premier McNeil,

In just a few weeks' time, premiers will gather in Quebec City to discuss climate change in the lead up to the COP21 meeting in Paris, December 2015. Premier Couillard has invited you and your esteemed colleagues to share best practices and highlight provincial leadership so that it may be showcased in Paris as parties work to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate.

The Ecology Action Centre (EAC) is writing to strongly encourage you to attend this historic gathering of premiers, particularly given Nova Scotia's leadership on climate change.

Nova Scotia has made tremendous progress in mitigating climate change in the last decade. We have established ambitious targets and innovative policies that are working to transition our electricity system away from fossil fuels, diversify our domestic energy supply by developing our renewable resources, and reduce demand for energy while saving Nova Scotians money.

Never before have Canadian premiers gathered with the singular purpose of addressing climate change. It is essential that Nova Scotia be at the table.

The presence of Nova Scotia's premier would adequately reflect our province's commitment to climate change action and indicate our understanding that climate change impacts must be addressed in every aspect of our society. Climate change is not just an environmental issue; it is also an economic issue, a health issue, a rural development issue, a justice issue, and so on.

On the pathway to Paris, Nova Scotia will take stock of the significant progress we have made so far and define the substantial work that lies ahead. Sharing best practices with fellow premiers in Quebec City is an invaluable opportunity to enrich this process.

In preparation for Paris, provinces and New England states have committed to updating their Climate Change Action Plans (CCAP) for presentation at the 39th annual New England Governors/Eastern Canadian Premiers meeting. That meeting happens in August, 2015.

The Quebec Summit can be viewed as an incubator for the careful consideration and design needed to feed Nova Scotia's updated CCAP and carry us into the precedent-setting climate conversations that will characterize the remainder of 2015.

We sincerely hope that you will consider attending. See the following pages for our recommendations on important conversations to have at the Quebec Summit.

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Top 5 Quebec Conversation Starters

The EAC has identified five key areas Nova Scotia can benefit from exploring in the context of the Quebec Climate Summit.

1) Carbon Pricing

The conversation about putting a price on pollution in Nova Scotia has gained impressive momentum in very little time. This is a clear indication that we are ready to enter the dialogue surrounding carbon pricing that is lighting up Canada's provinces, thought leaders, and industry.

Putting a price on carbon would affirm Nova Scotia's commitment to transitioning away from fossil fuel dependence. It would also open the door to the transformative potential carbon pricing holds for our fiscal system while sending a bold signal to the clean energy industry that our province is a place to invest.

Nova Scotia has much to gain by discussing the successes and shortfalls of carbon pricing systems with provinces that have them, and exchanging lessons-learned with provinces that are also in the midst of deciding how to best price carbon within their own jurisdictions.

2) Adaptation

While Nova Scotia has made strides in climate change mitigation, there is room for improvement in our adaptation efforts. For instance, we are one of the only coastal jurisdictions in North America that does not have a province- or state-wide plan for protecting coastal ecosystems and human communities and preparing them for the impacts of climate change.

Nova Scotia is on the front lines of climate change impacts. A majority of our population lives in coastal areas; much of that population is rural. Natural resource sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture dominate our economy. Coastal erosion and floods are already costing this province millions of dollars every year. With drastic cuts to federal disaster relief funds that we historically depended upon, now is the time to prepare our communities for the impacts of climate change and avoid huge future financial, cultural, and ecological costs.

Adapting to climate change is a challenge facing every province and territory, and several of these jurisdictions have inspiring climate adaptation plans from which Nova Scotia can take direction. EAC is confident that other Canadian jurisdictions will offer Nova Scotia great insight as we move forward in preparing for the impacts of climate change.

3) Regionalization

We know for certain that continuing Nova Scotia's advancement in renewable energy development and electricity system transformation depends on our ability to break through provincial boundaries and better connect to our neighbours.

Atlantic Canadian premiers have other opportunities to meet. However, the Quebec Summit is a moment to couch the discussion of enhanced regionalization within a framework of national efforts on climate change while inviting input from provinces and territories outside of the Atlantic region.

4) Transportation

Our transportation sector represents the largest gap in Nova Scotia's efforts to meet our overall greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions goals. While GHGs from our electricity sector are in decline, transportation contributes more harmful pollutants to our air every year.

Given the rural settlement pattern of Nova Scotia and other Maritime provinces, a regional approach to sustainable transportation makes sense. We also know from the extensive public consultation recently undertaken by the Electricity Review that Nova Scotians are extremely interested in electric vehicles (EVs).

It is vital that Nova Scotia discuss the challenge of cleaning up our transportation sector with provinces like Saskatchewan, which hosts a public transportation authority that services a population and area the size of the Maritime Provinces combined, and Quebec, which is leading the country in EV infrastructure development.

5) Pathways to a Fossil Free Future

Despite our progress, Nova Scotia's electricity system still relies heavily on GHG-emitting fuels, making our province particularly vulnerable to likely future scenarios where federal climate change policy will regulate the electricity sector for deep emissions reductions. Confronting the reality of future regulatory scenarios and meaningfully addressing climate change means planning for a future where the carbon liability of Nova Scotia's electricity system is quickly eliminated.

As discussed by the Electricity Review, we must start planning now for the year 2030 and beyond. Electricity and energy infrastructure is expensive and lasts a long time. It is incumbent upon us to actively engineer the future we want and need.

Several provinces are working hard to plan for fossil free electricity systems by certain dates. While Nova Scotia's parameters are unique, we will only benefit from communicating closely with other jurisdictions dedicated to transition.