



A Northern Vision: A Stronger North and a Better Canada

Background Information

The joint-release of the *Northern Vision* was announced by Yukon Premier Dennis Fentie, Northwest Territories Premier Joe Handley, and Nunavut Premier Paul Okalik, at the fifth annual Northern Premiers' Forum, May 26th, 2007.

The *Northern Vision* outlines priorities focusing on sovereignty and sustainable communities, adapting to climate change, and circumpolar relations. The *Northern Vision* is not an end product, but a beginning. It is an invitation for the federal, provincial, Aboriginal, and community governments, as well as non-governmental organizations and the private sector to partner with the territories, both jointly and bilaterally, to advance these priorities and fulfill the vision. The *Northern Vision* will act as a reference framework for future territorial policy and direction.

The development of the *Northern Vision* was officially announced at the fourth annual Northern Premiers' Forum in Iqaluit on November 7, 2006, where territorial Premiers met to renew the Northern Cooperation Accord. At that meeting, Premiers directed their officials to develop the *Northern Vision* to outline the unique challenges, opportunities, and issues affecting Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. The Premiers further instructed that the *Northern Vision* be a comprehensive plan framed under the broad themes of sovereignty and security, circumpolar relations and climate change impacts and adaptations, all of which Premiers agreed require a pan-territorial approach.

While the announcement of the development of a *Northern Vision* was in 2006, its actual origins can be traced back prior to the signing of the original Northern Cooperation Accord in September 2003 at the first annual Northern Premiers' Forum in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut. The Northern Cooperation Accord arose from a collective recognition of the strength of northern solidarity, which became evident earlier in 2003 when territorial Premiers worked collaboratively to secure an additional \$60 million for the North as part a national healthcare arrangement with the federal government.

In May 2004, territorial Premiers announced they would develop a common strategy on matters of mutual concern including healthcare, northern resource and economic development, sovereignty and security, climate change and infrastructure. One of the outcomes of this work was the discussion paper titled *Developing a New Framework for Sovereignty and Security in the North* released at the Northern Premiers' Forum in Yellowknife, April 2005.

These initial discussions drew the attention of the federal government, which offered to participate with the territories in a process that would be called the Northern Strategy. From the December 2004 release of the Framework for the Northern Strategy through November 2005, the territorial governments worked together with the federal government to engage northerners in an unprecedented consultation process that was intended to inform the development of a strategy that reflected the needs and ideals of northerners.

An impressive number of individuals and organizations contributed to the process with thoughtful responses and participation. Input and involvement included northerners, Aboriginal governments, non-government organizations, stakeholders, private sector and other Canadians. As part of the process, ministers and senior officials took part in a number of roundtables, town hall meetings, intergovernmental forums, and consultations with key stakeholders. This was complemented by an advertising campaign to both inform northerners of the development of the strategy, and to encourage their input through a widely distributed questionnaire.

The January 2006 federal election brought a new government to Ottawa and the Premiers understood that Canada's New Government needed time to formulate its priorities for the North. Those federal priorities - sovereignty, prosperity, and quality of life - were introduced in August 2006, when Prime Minister Stephen Harper traveled across the North. In his *Call of the North* speech delivered in Yellowknife at the conclusion of his northern tour, the Prime Minister envisioned a North "...that is stronger, more prosperous and liberated from the paternalistic policies of the past." Territorial Premiers were encouraged by the focus he placed on the importance of the territories to the future of all Canadians.

Based in part on the Northern Premiers' endorsement of the Prime Minister's long-term northern policy goals, it was decided that the time had come for the territorial governments to apply the principles of cooperation of the Northern Collaboration Accord. Using the valuable feedback garnered from northerners and other stakeholders through the Northern Strategy process the Premiers chose to develop the *Northern Vision* as the next step in charting the course for a stronger North and better Canada.