



North American Environment Ministers Accelerate Environmental Protection Efforts

Toronto, August 2, 1996 —

The Council of the Commission for Environment Cooperation (CEC) — made up of Canadian Environment Minister Sergio Marchi, Mexican Secretary of Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries Julia Carabias and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol Browner — today reported to the public on progress made this past year in meeting the goals set under the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC).

The Toronto Council session targeted-in on cooperation among the three countries to maintain and strengthen environmental standards and regulations to better protect the health of the population. The three environment leaders reaffirmed their commitment to working together, noting that the CEC is a unique forum for taking substantive action on critical environmental challenges including improving the quality of air in North America and eliminating dangerous chemicals.

At the meeting, the Council took action on the following:

Enhancing environmental and public health protections

In recognition of the need for continuous improvement of environmental protection and public health, the Council agreed to explore the development of a program to promote environmental performance based on best practices in the public and private sectors that exceeds mere compliance with domestic environmental and public health requirements.

The Council further agreed to develop principles to help guide the development of a new generation of environmental regulatory and other management systems, in accordance with each country's laws in order to avoid a reduction of effective environmental protection and public health standards.

Environment and Trade

The Council recognized the unique perspective on the relation between trade and environment policies provided by the North American experience. The Council agreed to seek a joint meeting with trade ministers of the three countries to review the North American experience towards integrating trade and environment policies. The Council also agreed that senior trade and environment officials from the three countries should meet shortly to explore the possibilities for common ground in advance of the World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial meeting in Singapore in December.



Air Monitoring and Modeling

Responding to public concern in the three countries over worsening air quality, the Council agreed to work together to take a critical step in jointly battling air pollution. The CEC will work towards data compatibility methodologies and technologies for monitoring air toxics. The CEC will also establish cooperation in air quality monitoring and modeling through pilot projects in North America. These efforts include the joint placement and calibration of specialized monitoring equipment at mutually agreed upon locations in North America. This work will contribute to a joint action plan for reducing air pollutants.

Reducing Dangerous Chemicals

The Council announced that the draft regional action plans for four toxic substances — PCBs, chlordane, DDT and mercury — are being released for public comment by October and are scheduled for completion in December. The Council will proceed with the development of action plans for at least two additional substances, to be announced in early 1997. Last year, the Council created a Sound Management of Chemicals Working Group charged with the development of regional action plans to reduce or phase-out selected persistent, toxic and bioaccumulative substances.

Next Steps on Cozumel

The Council unanimously decided that a factual record will be prepared regarding a submission on enforcement matters concerning the construction and operation of a public harbor terminal in Cozumel, Mexico. The submission was filed in January 1996 by Mexican environmental nongovernmental organizations. The CEC's Secretariat advised the Council that a factual record should be developed. In developing the factual record, the Secretariat is directed by the Council to consider whether the Party concerned is failing to effectively enforce its environmental law since the NAAEC's entry into force on January 1, 1994. Relevant facts that existed prior to that date may also be included.

Public Participation in Decision-Making

This year, the Council had instructed the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) to hold direct consultations with the public. The JPAC held consultations in Montreal, San Diego and Toronto. The JPAC is compiling a report on those public consultations and the Council pledged to use this report to assist it in establishing priorities for 1997. So far, priorities arrived at include air, voluntary compliance and networking between communities. The Council recognized that JPAC's work complements the work of the National Advisory Committees in each of the three countries.



North American Pollutants Release Inventory

The Council announced that the first annual North American Pollutant Release Inventory (NAPRI) will be published in February 1997, as part of an effort to provide the public with information on pollutant sources and risks. This inventory will bring together existing national public information from the three countries about emissions. In the long-run, the NAPRI will help improve the quality of the environment by providing the public with information to assess North American pollutant sources and risks. It also serves as a model for similar efforts in other parts of the world because North America represents the largest land mass ever to be subjected to compatible methods of reporting on pollutant emissions of mutual concern.

Enforcement Cooperation

To advance its commitment to more effective enforcement, the Council created a North American Working Group on Environmental Enforcement and Compliance. This group, composed of senior level environmental enforcement officials from the three countries, will be a forum for developing regional strategies on enforcement and sharing information. Concrete initiatives include joint action on improved systems for tracking illegal transborder movement of hazardous substances and wastes, improving training for the enforcement of chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) anti-smuggling laws and cooperating on enforcement of the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wildlife Flora and Fauna (CITES) and the development of compliance indicators.

Environmental Technologies: “Green Jobs”

The Council today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with three organizations in North America which together will develop a North American Environment Technology Information Service. This service, which will disseminate information on environmental technologies and services, will help both the public and private sectors to make environmentally and economically sound choices when investing in new technology. This service will also help environmental technology suppliers in Canada, Mexico and the United States increase sales — not just throughout North America, but also to Central and South America.

Funding Communities

The Council released the names of the first group of recipients of the recently-created North American Fund for Environmental Cooperation (NAFEC). This fund targets grants to community-based projects that help in implementing the work of the CEC. The Council awarded 14 groups a total of one million dollars (CAN) for work being done at the local level. Another round of grants will be awarded in December.



Protecting Migratory Species

The Council today committed itself to several key actions aimed at the protection of migratory species. The first action focuses on migratory birds, whose breeding, resting and feeding grounds are threatened. The CEC is working to establish a North American Network of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) by the end of 1996. Today, the Council announced the first three North American IBAs: El Carricito del Huichol pine forest in Jalisco, Mexico; Long Point, Ontario, Canada; and the San Pedro Conservation Area in Arizona. Also, the Council called for the development of a North American strategy for the conservation of birds. Such a strategy, which will include clear goals and objectives, will enable countries to coordinate their domestic bird conservation efforts.

In response to the CEC Secretariat's *Report on the Death of Migratory Birds at the Silva Reservoir (1994-1995)*, the Council agreed to develop a North American rapid response system for addressing epidemic disease outbreaks of migratory birds.

This year, the Council also took measures to protect the Monarch butterfly, a species which has become a symbol of the ecological interdependency between the three countries. The Council announced the development of a Monarch Butterfly Conservation Program, which will include actions such as the exchange of important information to better map and monitor migratory Monarch habitats, the establishment of additional protected areas and the development of eco-tourism projects which promote private-sector involvement in the protection of migratory Monarchs.

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