

**NINETEENTH REGULAR SESSION OF THE COUNCIL
Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)**

**10-11 July 2012
New Orleans, Louisiana, United States**

SUMMARY RECORD

The Council held its nineteenth Regular Session on 10-11 July 2012, in New Orleans, Louisiana, United States. Lisa P. Jackson, Administrator of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), chaired the meeting, Juan Elvira Quesada, Secretary for Environment and Natural Resources, and Peter Kent, Canadian Minister of the Environment represented Mexico and Canada, respectively. Evan Lloyd, CEC Executive Director, represented the Secretariat. Nathalie Daoust, Council Secretary, acted as secretary for the Session. Other delegates and special invitees were also in [attendance](#).

Council Public Meeting

Item 7 Healthy Communities and Ecosystems

Item 7.1 Introduction on the conduct/new format of the session

Administrator Jackson opened the public session by welcoming participants and introducing Martin Gutierrez Lacayo, the Chair of the CEC Joint Public Advisory Committee. Mr. Gutierrez Lacayo handed the summary report from the JPAC workshop to the Council on behalf of the North American public, congratulating the organization for the progress made on the three strategic orientations of the Strategic Plan 2010-2015.

Item 7.2 Presentation and discussion on progress in reducing exposure to airborne contaminants in homes in indigenous communities of Alaska

Troy Ritter, Applied Sciences Manager, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, presented the project on “Improving Indoor Air Quality in Alaskan Native Populations and Other Indigenous Communities in North America”. He provided an overview of respiratory health problems related to poor indoor air quality observed in children from native and other indigenous Alaskan communities. The objectives of this project are to improve indoor air quality, and develop a model that can be replicated in other indigenous communities in North America. Preliminary results suggest that improvement in sleeping arrangement, air exchange system, wood stove system (replacing old stoves with EPA-certified energy efficient systems), and ventilation leads to increased indoor air quality with potential positive impact on child health. Mr. Ritter concluded his presentation by thanking the project partners, and by underlining the importance of immediate action for improving living conditions in indigenous Alaskan communities. (The full presentation can be found [here](#)).

Questions from the public and remarks from Council members:

Each Council member thanked the presenter for managing this successful project.

The following question was received from Facebook: *“Regulation should be in place for limiting wood burning. Why is this not given immediate priority?”*

Administrator Jackson indicated that EPA is supporting these actions globally via its national standards, and that each State is acting regionally to tackle this specific problem.

The following question was asked by the ***Bucket Brigade*** group: *“Louisiana has been described by EPA Inspector General as having a culture of defending industry. What can be done to convince the EPA to take back delegation of environmental laws from Louisiana?”*

Administrator Jackson mentioned that the EPA was working with all States to enhance efforts and accountability via, for example, increased enforcement and through the permitting process. She added that EPA was currently carrying out a review with the objective of leveling the playing field.

The following question was asked: *“Native populations in the Arctic North suffer a high rate of lung issues related to bad air quality. This is a problem that can be solved and it is very encouraging to see this work occurring.”*

Administrator Jackson shared that children’s health issues are very important and link communities together. The issues this community faces, as shown by Mr. Ritter, are poignant, she added, and no community should accept pollution as the by-product of economic progress.

Item 7.3 Presentation and discussion on progress in promoting and implementing measures to limit harmful environmental exposures in communities surrounding Lake Chapala

Enrique Cifuentes and Felipe Lozano (University of Guadalajara and Environmental Pediatric Unit of Lake Chapala (PEHSU) presented the results and successful experiences that have sustained and strengthened the creation of the Environmental Pediatric Unit of Lake Chapala. The presentation began with a video of the project showing the positive impacts of improved sanitation and access to potable water in community schools. Following the video, Mr. Cifuentes noted that more than 2 million deaths linked to disease from inadequate sanitation can be avoided via similar initiatives. According to him, this has implications in communities with similar challenges, such as in Alaska. Mr. Lozano summarized the results of the program, stating that public toilets were built in five public schools, and training was offered to children for hand-washing and environmental health best practices. He noted that reaching out to children in schools presented an opportunity to foster better long-term practices in both children and their parents, and to develop interest in cross-disciplinary fields such as budget management, transparency and accountability, thereby empowering the larger community. He concluded the presentation by underlining the importance of considering children’s health in a larger contextual environment (i.e. in schools and communities) instead of in isolation, to ensure maximum positive impact. (The full presentation can be found [here](#)).

Questions from the public and remarks from Council members:

Administrator Jackson thanked the presenters, and commented that this successful initiative had the potential for replication not only at a national level but also internationally.

Secretary Elvira congratulated the presenters for achieving such success in a particularly vulnerable community. He noted that children's health involve multi-level and multi-dimensional awareness and collaboration between federal, state and municipal jurisdictions across the Health, Public Education, and Environmental Ministries.

Minister Kent welcomed the successful concept and implementation of this project and resulting benefits to the children.

The following question was asked by Leonordo Noriel: *“How will future projects on resilient communities be supported in Mexico?”*

Secretary Elvira answered that through the Mexican Climate Change Act and associated reforms, Semarnat has funds available for these types of projects. Even if the concept of community resilience is new in Mexico, funding for these projects can be obtained under the national effort for improving energy efficiency, monitoring air quality, etc.

Question 2: “What are the main criteria considered when supporting projects in communities?”

Felipe Lozano answered that the main criterion is response capacity, i.e. the ability of the University and available research students to fulfill the needs and resources sought by a community. Enrique Cifuentes added that the selection is also dependent on community interest and concerns regarding specific issues, and the ability of the University to address them.

The following question was asked by Administrator Jackson to Evan Lloyd: *“What is the role of the CEC in communicating such projects to the public?”*

Evan Lloyd explained that the CEC is hoping to learn and share the lessons learned from this collaborative, trilateral work, so that the model may be applied to other communities. The CEC is continuing its mission to provide funding and support to reinforce communication and bridge knowledge gaps between countries.

Item 7.4 Presentation and discussion on progress on facilitating action to address climate change adaptation needs in indigenous communities in Canada and the United States

Merrell-Ann Phare and Lisa Hardess from the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) made a presentation on “Climate Change Adaptation Planning: Facilitating Action to Address Climate Change Adaptation Needs in Indigenous North America”.

Ms. Hardess began the presentation by underlying the adverse effects of climate change on long-term sustainability of indigenous communities given their relationship with land and water, thus their

dependence on natural resources, and their tendency to live in a more vulnerable state due to historic marginalization. She added that communities have seen these changes affect their infrastructures, their transportation, access to traditional foods and medicines, their ability to practice and teach their children their traditions, and their language and culture. Due to unique ecosystems and cultural realities, she said, indigenous communities will experience climate change differently, and therefore stronger efforts will need to be made towards their adaptation to climate change. This NAPECA project centers around planning a forum on climate change adaptation to be held in the village of Kanatakon (St. Regis), Akwesasne, with the objective of building community resilience capacity of tribal and indigenous groups, and to transfer the knowledge gained and lessons learned in the workshop to other communities across North America. The outcome of this forum will be a draft implementation plan identifying priority areas and next steps. In conclusion, she indicated that the forum will provide opportunities to create new and strengthened networks as well as communities of practice for ongoing knowledge sharing. (The full presentation can be found [here](#)).

Questions from the public and remarks from Council members:

Administrator Jackson commented that the topic of indigenous communities' resilience to climate change is often overlooked. She indicated she looked forward to the outcomes of the knowledge sharing network.

Secretary Elvira mentioned that this workshop will provide important information on the impact of climate change on key resources, such as water, and will be very useful at a regional and global scale.

Minister Kent thanked the presenter and added that his government is moving towards adaptation rather than mitigation, especially above the 49th parallel. In this regard, he added, this project is very pertinent for preparing communities to the evolving impacts of climate change, a dimension of the issue that is often overlooked.

The following question was received from ***Jennifer Deroose***: *“What opportunities and support can the Canadian government provide to communities to increase their resilience and sustainability?”*

Minister Kent mentioned that this topic was discussed by the Council in the morning regarding how best practices could be brought to First nations and other communities in terms of fuel electricity generation and consumption. Infrastructures are significantly affected by the warming climate, causing supply problems in the North and decreasing the ability of communities to be flexible and resilient. He agreed this represents a huge challenge that at all levels of government need to attend to.

The following question was asked by a member of the web audience: *“What are the public policies that were specifically implemented for climate change mitigation and adaptation in Mexico?”*

Secretary Elvira explained that in the last 5 years, the Mexican government has been working towards a strategy to address climate change via emission reduction, promoting sustainable transportation, efficient water use, tourism, etc. The Climate Change Act establishes new goals for

emissions reduction for 2020-2030 and includes national and regional adaptation plans. He added that the Act has spun great interest from the international community.

The following question was received on Twitter by the *New Brunswick Climate Change Hub*: “*To support ecosystems and community resilience, can the CEC support member governments to standardize data, information and other tools for decision-making, for example, to study the impacts of climate change on ecosystem services and public health?*”

Minister Kent mentioned that Canada is working on sharing data. Administrator Jackson followed by saying that her agency is collecting and sharing information grounded in facts and community-level experience. This effort is part an economic opportunity for development and re-development, where governments are encouraged to think creatively to find solutions. Secretary Elvira noted that political will is the primary ingredient to unify and share information based on similar criteria. In his opinion, advice from the JPAC and close interaction with communities is yielding great results for better decision-making in North America. He took the opportunity to applaud the format of the public meeting, underlining how it is the result of cooperative efforts.

The following question was received from a representative of the Gulf Restoration Network: “*How will the funds from the Clean Water Act, related to the Deep Horizon spill, be made available?*”

Administrator Jackson recalled that a report was completed in fall 2011, outlining restoration activities in the Gulf. Community resilience is one of the platforms included in the report. The RESTORE Act is dedicating BP's eventual Clean Water Act fines to Gulf restoration and recovery.

Item 8 Dialogue on community and ecosystem resilience

Item 8.1 Introduction by moderator

Evan Lloyd opened the session by introducing the presenter, and informed the audience that he will be sharing questions received from universities and the public.

Item 8.2 University presentation and exchange of views with the Council

Payton Wilkins from Dillard University presented the work of the Students for Environmental Justice Club, established under the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (DSCEJ). The student club has been carrying out community resiliency seminars, workshops, and site visits to introduce sustainability and equity concepts, integrate community outreach, support initiatives into program activities, and encourage solutions. The DSCEJ teaches the environmental component of Dillard University’s Youth Leadership Institute Summer Program, teaching 7-12 graders about environmental justice, climate change, and green jobs. Mr. Wilkins concluded by underlining the importance of connecting people in promoting resiliency and sustainability. (The full presentation can be found [here](#)).

Administrator Jackson began her remarks by giving her regards to Dr. Beverly Wright for reaching out to elementary school children on issues related to sustainability. Seeing the trend of increased urban population, this initiative is a great example of preparatory work toward ensuring sustainable

living by transforming human impact (e.g. waste and pollution) into opportunities. In her opinion, this is the vision and spirit of resilience.

Maureen Lichtveld from Tulane University summarized her perspective on the environmental health threats that are facing vulnerable populations. She mentioned that every student at the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine must complete 120 hours of public service, such as helping to rebuild communities after Hurricane Katrina. She hopes that the final JPAC report will put a greater emphasis on public health, and reflect the *real* people, and their culture. She followed by giving examples of how science works for communities: 1) after hurricane Katrina, 80 percent of the city was flooded and mold problems began in thousands of homes. The question that was asked then was: “What would happen to asthmatic children who are exposed to unprecedented high levels of mold?” Measurements showed that children in the city had the highest level of allergies to mold than any other US city. Her team was able to work on solutions for the community by assigning asthma counselors; 2) After the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, communities asked three questions: “Is my seafood safe to eat? Is the air in my house safe to breathe? What will happen with the new generation of children born after the oil spill?” Her team worked with communities on a proposal to address these questions. The project resulted in hiring 40 community workers in 17 counties affected by the oil spill.

Ms. Lichtveld suggested that the solution that will be proposed by the CEC or the JPAC must transcend borders. The health of the ecosystems is linked to the health of communities.

Ms. Lichtveld concluded by asking the following question: “*How can we address both environmental health threats and opportunities to help vulnerable communities in a way that is sustainable, where communities can participate across the Americas, in an integrated and community-driven fashion?*”

Minister Kent answered that the work under NAPECA is driven by community project proposals, which are considered and prioritized by the Secretariat. In 2 years, when the CEC and NAFTA will celebrate 20 years of existence, we need to realize what has been accomplished and also the new challenges that are ahead. We need to reassess the criteria for choosing CEC projects that have maximum impact and benefit across our three countries. As seen from the NAPECA projects, it appears that we can successfully replicate the success from one area to other locations. Health is an essential part of our focus as well as addressing ecosystem imbalance.

Secretary Elvira suggested that with increased understanding of resilience and readiness, the CEC could create a brief questionnaire for communities and citizens that would help assess their level of preparedness to resilience, based on local factors and threats. Based on these experiences, the governments could provide new instruments and develop public policies to assist its citizens. He suggested that the recommendations stemming from the JPAC workshop be integrated into a strategy for future CEC work.

The following question was received from **A. J. Balatico from Tulane University, School of Science and Engineering**: “*How can you contribute to empower and incentivize school systems to reduce their overall environmental impact?*”

The following question was also asked: *“Clean air and clean water are two elements that EPA has monitored and shared extensive information on. Not all State environmental agencies are willing to pursue the issue of environmental justice from a value perspective in terms of recognizing their impact on minorities. How can you encourage the understanding of the value of air and water quality, and the principles of protection at all levels of government?”*

Administrator Jackson pointed as an example to the Green Ribbon Schools Contest that rewards schools that decide to build a sustainable structure and incorporate sustainability and green concepts into the students’ learning experience. We, as a society, have to find ways to encourage folks to think about the importance of investing in low income communities. This contest takes into account those communities that are challenged economically. Scientific studies show that children learn better in a school that has light, clean air and safe playing areas. To encourage the understanding of the value of social justice in all levels of government, EPA runs the Environmental Justice Program, which endeavors to protect communities against discrimination and lack of proper environmental enforcement. She added that environmental justice issues are still present and are part what remains to be tackled by the US domestic environmental movement. These include the remaining vulnerable communities such as tribal groups, boarder communities, and rural and urban communities with limited access to a clean environment. For these communities, information is extremely empowering.

Minister Kent underlined that environmental justice support for communities beyond First Nations and disadvantaged communities is also the focus of Environment Canada. He gave as an example the new regulations for waste water management that Environment Canada will soon be publishing.

Two videos were presented. The first video, presented by **Brad deYoung from Memorial University**, discussed the issue of regime shifts in ocean ecosystems, the stress of climate change, pollution and fishing, and the need for a new approach to ocean management and science. Professor deYoung asked the Council to support joint marine ecosystem programs in North American waters for the study and observation of regime shifts in order to improve ocean management.

A second video was received from **Alyssa Chang** who asked the following question: *“What actions Canada is taking to protect marine resources at home and beyond the 200 mile limit? Are there examples where Canada has been a role model?”*

Minister Kent answered that Canada has embarked on protecting several marine areas nationally, protecting fish and habitat while allowing limited and responsible sport and commercial usage of those waters. He added that Canada has to continue working with other countries to adopt similar responsible practices in terms of migratory fish stocks, overfishing, pollution, waste management, and responsible stewardship.

Administrator Jackson mentioned that the National Oceans Council is working on those issues (including in the Great Lakes and the Gulf of Mexico) from the stand point of toxics, pollution and fisheries issues with the objective of using and exploiting the ocean’s resources in a sustainable manner. She added that the EPA has put priority on working with the US Congress on the Law of the Sea Treaty to address issues beyond the 200 miles limit. One example is the emissions control

process, where EPA in collaboration with SEMARNAT requires that ship switch their engines to minimum emission levels as they enter the West Coast region.

A question was received from **Federico Llamas from Universidad del Medio Ambiente Valle de Bravo**: *“Considering watershed economics and the concept of local economy, any citizen should have a better understanding of the water basin they live in, in order to make sustainable social and economically-sound decisions on water, food and energy. The map created by the CEC is a great way of visualizing the water basins throughout North America. Unsustainable decisions on water use were made in the past, such as the export of water from Valle de Bravo to Mexico City. The suggestion is to involve authorities in enhancing small scale/community scale decision-making based on watershed management in order to ensure sustainability, including water and energy supply.”*

Secretary Elvira mentioned that the National Water Commission and the Natural Forestry Commission base their decisions on a per-basin approach. He explained that water is being exported from Valle de Bravo to Mexico City to refurbish the aquifer in order to prevent the city from sinking. By the end of the year, Mexico aims to reach 25% of total energy from clean energy, which is concurrent with the 35% set by the Climate Change Act by 2025. Also, the Water Bill supports communities able to provide clean water via forest stewardship. He stated that Mexico is interested in maintaining this watershed approach for ensuring food and energy security in communities. Regarding the oceans, he suggested that fishing and caring for marine resources be thought differently and integrate, for example, the notion of ecotourism (e.g. recreational fishing in Baja California). He remarked that sustainable management of oceans can offer alternatives to feeding populations without depleting natural resources.

A representative from the **Asociación interamericana del medio ambiente y reciclaje** asked the following question: *“What would be the administrative strategy to implement only one water quality standard?”*

In a video by **Gloria Soto Montes de Oca from Universidad Iboramerica in Mexico City**, she asked the following question: *“Aquifers that supply water to Mexico City have been overexploited. It would be necessary to consider all the externalities in all surrounding rivers of the city. In that sense, there is a need for resilience of ecosystems due to their high value to society. Economic theory states that all natural resources have a value. Studies have shown that inhabitants are willing to pay important amounts to improve water quality in the city, such as the case in Tlaxcala. How will the authorities guarantee that they recognize the value of resources in order to improve their sustainability?”*

Secretary Elvira pointed out that water pricing is set by the Mexican administration. The state supplies water to municipalities to ensure adequate quality standard, sanitation and wastewater infrastructure, and to avoid overexploitation of aquifers. Achieving water quality requires technical capacity and Mexico is working to standardize the system in order to meet water quality requirements.

A video by the *Climate Change Adaptation Research Group at McGill University* was presented to the Council on the impact of climate change on decreased food security in communities living in Northern Canada.

Iqaluit Mayor Madeleine Redfern gave a short speech on the living conditions of vulnerable communities, recognizing that climate will be changing from year to year and that this CEC event is a place to share experiences. Resilience has many meanings, such as understanding, achieving, assessing risk, and preparing to changes. She provided examples of well-intended regulations that have created negative impacts on Northern communities, such as the environmental protection act for protecting polar bears, which prohibits the US polar bear hunt even though bear populations have been stable in the region. She also mentioned the value of diversity and its inclusion in decision-making. She asked “*Would Canada be prepared to include indigenous communities in the JPAC or other venues to ensure that their realities and needs are taken into account?*”

Minister Kent pointed out that food security is a matter of great concern in the North in regards to climate change, traditional hunt, and supply. The CEC is a very inclusive organization. The Canadian Health Minister is from Nunavut and is a very strong advocate at the cabinet table in raising specifically such issues. There is a sense of urgency since the changes are coming very quickly. Supply of food and necessities remain a very important issue, he concluded.

Administrator Jackson added that the CEC Council recognizes that these are not issues that will be legislated, although it would be desirable. What is emerging is the understanding that what yield the best results are community-led solutions with smart government policy intervention that do no harm. To develop the best solutions, it is therefore important for governments to understand what the challenges are by giving space to academics, NGOs, civil society and the private sector. In this regard, the EPA wants to ensure it contributes to the emergence of collaborative solutions by playing a role in helping bring collaborators together. This forum gives us all an opportunity to think very creatively about where we should be going as policy makers, she concluded.

The following question was asked: “*Regarding funding and financial support, what opportunities exist in North America (at the government level) for climate change research at the community level?*”

Minister Kent mentioned that the NAPECA program is a good place for this type of activity. There are benefits in sharing best data and best practices among CEC parties. In the time of fiscal restrains, this issue needs to be addressed with adequate funding. Administrator Jackson added that the CEC is not the primary forum for addressing issues on climate change in each individual country. In the US, these issues are being looked at by EPA, NASA, and US Corps of Engineers and others under a task force that President Obama has created. The CEC shouldn't be the main source of support. Each country needs to find innovative solutions for funding, including from the private sector, particularly given the interconnectivity of all sectors on this issue.

Catherine Etmanski from Royal Roads University made the following statement: “*Congratulations to the CEC for convening what looks like a terrific agenda. I hope your discussions have been fruitful and inspiring, and I also hope that you haven't shied away from the more difficult conversations. I am heartened by community's capacity for resilience and creativity. I*

am concerned for the increasing need for resilience in the face of human made environmental emergencies and wonder how we can claim any legitimacy in terms of a meaningful stance on sustainability. My question stems from that concern. I would like the panel to address the underlying values of profit and continual growth that drive our current economic system. What will it take to shift our dominant values and worldview so that people and planet truly are at the center for seven generations and beyond?"

Minister Kent answered that sustainable development is focused on balancing the three pillars being the protection and preservation of the environment, societal concerns and the economy.

Administrator Jackson added that an increasing number of companies understand that sustainability can save money and help make long-term decisions. It is important to price the value of natural capital and talk about externalities in a way that is fair and just. Governments have to use those tools, some of which are economic. She added she believes that the current generation of people is one that understands that the choice between the economy and the environment is not necessary. She shared her pride to be working as part of an administration that is building an economy meant to last without sacrificing energy security, clean air and water, and our resources, in the interest of our people and our planet.

Regarding profits and continuous growth, Secretary Elvira concluded the key word is competitiveness. No one will be able to stop development, however, technology can become a big ally. Furthermore, internalizing externalities can lead to money savings and increased competitiveness.

Item 9 Report on the SEM modernization process and adoption of revised SEM guidelines

Administrator Jackson thanked the Secretariat and JPAC for their support and efforts. On behalf of the Council, she thanked everyone involved in the SEM modernization review process, an exercise that included involvement and an organized effort. She was pleased to report that the Council, during its in-camera session, adopted the revised SEM guidelines to increase timeliness, transparency and accessibility. Additionally, the Council decided to support the SEM Modernization Review Task Force's proposal for SEM process follow-up.

She described that key revisions to the SEM guidelines include:

- Establishing target deadlines at key stages of the SEM process in order to reduce the average process time of submissions by 50%;
- Providing that the Council explain its reasoning in writing when and if a factual record decision varies from the Secretariat's recommendation; and
- Facilitating communications between potential submitters and party experts prior to a submission being filed as a way to ensure a fair access to the process.

Additionally, the Council will work with the Secretariat and the JPAC to:

- 1) establish an online SEM portal to increase accessibility;
- 2) develop and implement a SEM public outreach plan to increase awareness of the SEM process and assistance tools that are available, with a view to assessing the effectiveness of this plan at a later date; and

- 3) monitor and assess the implementation of the revised SEM guidelines to immediately start tracking compliance and mandatory target deadlines identified to work on establishing longer term assessment tools.

Questions from the public and remarks from Council members:

Raul Pache from the web audience asked the following question: “*Can the Council provide explanations in instances where it does not instruct Secretariat to prepare a factual record?*”

Administrator Jackson answered that the answer is yes. The Council has agreed that when it decides to make a decision different than the recommendation the Secretariat has proposed, the rationale will be in writing and made publicly available.

She concluded by thanking her fellow Council members for this endeavor.

Item 10 Signing of Council resolutions and ministerial statement

The chair invited her counterparts to join in signing Council Resolution 12-05 on establishing funding for the CEC for 2013, and Council Resolution 12-06 adopting the Revised Guidelines for Submissions on Enforcement Matters under Articles 14 and 15 of the NAAEC, as well as the Ministerial Statement.

Item 11 Closing Remarks by Minister Kent and Secretary Elvira

Minister Kent commented this was one of the most engaging sessions. New Orleans is a living example of resiliency, he stated. He underlined the warmth of its citizens and thanked all local participants. He underlined the revisions to the SEM process, pointing out that transparency and access will hopefully be enhanced. He also reaffirmed Canada’s commitment to continued cooperation and dialogue with the US and Mexico.

Secretary Elvira thanked again Administrator Jackson for her hospitality. He also thanked Minister Kent and the JPAC for their positive attitude and the fruitful exchange over the last two days. He also thanked the Secretariat staff. He brought attention to the evolution of the CEC and explained how it was created to protect the environment in response to the assumption that environmental destruction would result from the liberalization of trade. Yet, he stressed, because of the willingness of governments and the citizens of North America, the organization has gone beyond this endeavor to an instrument of true cooperation. He thanked the US and Canada for their collaboration and assured of Mexico’s commitment to a healthy environment in North America.

Item 12 Passing the Torch: New Council Chair and Concluding Remarks by Administrator Jackson

Administrator Jackson expressed pleasure in having hosted the meeting in her city of birth and pointed out its exemplary resiliency. She stated that the three countries need to respond to the challenges of the day by leading as one region and inspire constituents and be true to the vision of the CEC when it was created. This institution has been successful for 19 years with the three countries having deployed resources and having built a stronger relationship, she said. She stressed the importance of using

resources to ensure justice for the people of North America.

Administrator Jackson then proceeded to read excerpts from the full ministerial statement:

Nineteenth Regular Session of the CEC Council

New Orleans, 11 July 2012—Today, following a successful meeting of the Council of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), we are pleased to report that our discussions with key community, university and government partners from across North America have reinforced the accomplishments of our collective work, as well as the challenges we face as a region.

During our public dialogue which included students and professors from our three countries, we exchanged ideas with them and other members of the public on ways to collaboratively protect, sustain and restore the health of people, communities and ecosystems.

Progress through community partnerships

We also heard from our partners in the North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action (NAPECA). They reported on how their community-based projects are already producing results that can be shared across our region. These include environmental health initiatives that protect children from waterborne diseases in Mexico, replacing wood-burning stoves and other improvements to enhance indoor air quality for Alaskan native populations, and building the capacity of indigenous communities in Canada and the US to adapt to climate changes affecting their livelihoods.

Our Joint Public Advisory Committee—informed by a two-day workshop—also provided us with their views on policy and action for a resilient future for North America.

Modernizing the Submissions on Enforcement Matters Process

Delivering on earlier commitments, today we also took decisive action to modernize the implementation of the Submissions on Enforcement Matters (SEM) process, making a number of improvements to increase timeliness, transparency, and accessibility, and bring greater clarity to this valuable information-sharing mechanism. Among the most significant changes, the revisions to the *Guidelines on Submissions on Enforcement Matters under Articles 14 and 15 of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC)* establish target deadlines for key steps in the SEM process to reduce the average processing time by half. Additionally, the changes call for Parties to follow up on concluded submissions with information on any new developments and actions taken regarding matters raised in such submissions. These revisions and changes are the culmination of a year-long collaboration between the Parties and the JPAC, the CEC Secretariat, and members of the North American public.

In line with our commitment to a robust and effective public submission process, and building on the collaboration and momentum of the past year's efforts, we have directed that additional steps be taken to enhance the SEM process, such as establishing new online tools to help with the preparation of a submission, increasing public outreach to build awareness of the process, and assessing compliance with the deadlines. Together these actions are expected to ensure that the public submission process remains a critical mechanism for facilitating public participation, supporting government transparency, and promoting the effective enforcement of environmental law in North America.

Strengthening our commitment to greening the North American economy

Noting the important international developments on building paths to foster greener economies, we discussed actions to strengthen this area of our cooperative work so that it can then be reproduced at the local, national, regional and international levels. We have instructed our officials to consider specific initiatives in areas such as electronic waste, short lived climate forcers, advancing on trilateral clean energy initiatives, and other specific economic integrated sectors in North America.

We thank the Panel for its final report and for its recommendations for a new framework. Earlier this year, the CEC Executive director participated in the meeting of the NAFTA Free Trade Commission. Pursuant to Article 10(6) of the NAAEC, we look forward to working with the Free Trade Commission, through the relevant officials, to ensure ongoing cooperation and communication.

Looking to the future in trilateral cooperation

In continuing our efforts from 2009 to build a more effective and efficient organization, we further direct our officials to develop fewer, more strategic projects that will produce significant results under the next operational plan.

We look forward to the 2013 Council Session in Mexico.

In closing, Administrator Jackson thanked the JPAC for its extraordinary contribution and for defining new ways to engage the North American public. She thanked the JPAC chair, Martin Gutierrez Lacayo, for his leadership. She also thanked the executive director for his positive attitude and responsiveness. She thanked everyone and the public for their hard work over the last few days. She then announced that Mexico will be assuming chairmanship of the Council and invited Secretary Elvira to say a few words.

Secretary Elvira assured his entire collaboration until 30 November as he pointed out that the new Mexican administration will be taking over on 1 December. He also assured support from his team during the transition period to ensure the CEC benefits from the same level of engagement on the part of Mexico.

Administrator Jackson officially adjourned the nineteenth session of the Council of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation.