

**TWENTY-FIRST REGULAR SESSION OF THE COUNCIL
Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)**

**16-17 July 2014
Yellowknife, NT, Canada**

SUMMARY RECORD

The Council held its Twenty-First Regular Session on 16–17 July 2014, in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada. Leona Aglukkaq, Canadian Environment Minister, chaired the meeting. Juan José Guerra, Secretary for Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat), and Gina McCarthy, Administrator of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) represented Mexico and the United States, respectively. Irasema Coronado, CEC Executive Director, represented the Secretariat. Nathalie Daoust, Council Secretary, acted as secretary for the Session. Other delegates were also in [attendance](#).

Council Public Meeting

Item 4 Welcome introduction by the Council

Item 4.1 Canadian Council member

The chair officially opened the public session and welcomed all visitors from across Canada, Mexico, and the US to Northern Canada. She also welcomed participants attending the Session via the hubs. She acknowledged the importance of the previous day's JPAC meeting and indicated that the session was engaging and productive and she looked forward to the continuing dialogue. She introduced the session and mentioned how this represents an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the past twenty years and will inform discussions on strategic priorities for 2015-2020. She indicated it will also focus on issues unique to the North and on the importance of traditional ecological knowledge. She then invited Administrator McCarthy and Secretary Guerra to provide opening remarks.

Item 4.2 US Council member

Administrator McCarthy recognized the long-standing and healthy relationship between the environmental agencies of the three countries and underscored their work and commitment to the shared environment. She noted how the three nations come together understanding that the connection goes further than family ties, economies or borders and that what really connects them most is knowing the value and importance of living in healthy and safe communities across the region. She pointed out that some cross boundaries issues need and require a coordinated effort that looks not only with every day community issues but also considers the broader issues that must be faced together as three countries. She pointed out that the parties have come together as part of the NAAEC as well as of the NAFTA, sharing a common vision that human health, the environment and the challenges they face cut across borders, and that the three countries can take advantage of joint opportunities. In closing, she emphasized that this is what the CEC is all about, and what has led to its success over the past years and will lead to even greater success in the future.

Item 4.3 Mexican Council member

Secretary Guerra Abud recognized the importance of this session in terms of exchanging with the public and JPAC representatives, and getting feedback in order to develop better public policies. He suggested that the 20-year anniversary of the CEC is the proper time to assess results achieved and set the basis for the coming years and guarantee that the economic partnership between the three countries continues to grow in a sustainable manner while respecting the environment and eradicating poverty. He also made reference to the meeting of the North American Leaders in Mexico where the three countries established clear priorities such as fighting climate change and mitigating its effects on populations; protecting biodiversity and promoting green growth. He also reported on a renewed commitment to the conservation and protection of the monarch butterfly expressed by the three leaders.

Item 5 Report from the Executive Director on results of the 2013-2014 Operational Plan

The Executive Director acknowledged the importance of government appointed and working group members as an integral part of the CEC's work. She [presented some of the achievements](#) of recent projects. In closing, she indicated she looked forward to collaborating on the vision for a new five-year strategic plan.

Item 6 Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the CEC

Item 6.1 Video presentation

The Executive Director presented the next portion of the agenda, with an introduction to the twentieth anniversary [video message](#) by the three Council members highlighting the twentieth anniversary accomplishments of the CEC.

Following the presentation, the chair thanked the Executive Director and pointed out that the video illustrates how valuable the CEC is to the three countries, and announced that it will be posted on the CEC website.

Item 6.2 20-year accomplishments

The chair delivered remarks on what the CEC and the NAAEC have meant to Canada over the past twenty years. She pointed out that when signing the NAAEC, the countries made a commitment that increasing trade would not bring a cost for the environment. She observed that the activities of the CEC have shown this commitment, and that the countries can be proud of the progress made. She emphasized that for Canada trade promotion and environmental protection go together “hand in hand”. She underlined that the NAAEC has served to demonstrate to citizens the possibility for the three countries to be successful maintaining a high bar for the environment while pursuing economic interests. She noted that the CEC has served as a model for other trade agreements. Since signing the NAFTA, Canada has continued to pursue environmental cooperation provisions in other trade agreements (i.e. free trade agreement with Chile). This approach to free trade remains a very effective tool for protecting the environment as pursuing stronger trade linkages. It has also served to increase

collaboration between the three countries.

Finally, Minister Aglukkaq recognized that the CEC has brought the three countries together to work toward a common cause and have a better understanding of their respective challenges, and sharing lessons learned. They have proven the ability to come together to identify common priorities. By combining resources and knowledge they have achieved far more for the environment than they could have done on their own and have been able to advance common North American interests on the global stage. She stated that this collaboration extends further than governments to their communities, this being the most valuable contribution to North America in different areas. The CEC needs to continue to evolve, and setting the five-years strategic priorities will keep the CEC relevant and the objective will remain to protect the North America environment, she concluded.

Administrator McCarthy thanked Ms. Coronado for the work of the CEC and recalled what was said in the video in that environmental challenges do not recognize political borders, and public officials and citizens must work together to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities deriving from knowledge and experience. She recognized the work of the CEC and all the experience it has cumulated to date. She highlighted some of the projects that mean the most to the US: 1) the work done on wood burning stoves in Alaska native communities being an example of how big issues can result in direct benefits for the community; 2) the work done with the auto industry sector as an example of engaging people in the communities as well as the private economic sector; and 3) the work related to Big Bend-Río Bravo, that really contributed to changing policies. As a result of this CEC initiative, Secretary Sally Jewell of the Department of the Interior is working on landscape protection, she noted. She stressed that the work that carries direct impact and leads to changes in policies and ultimately global changes is the one that includes a long term perspective and builds on lessons learned. Finally she encouraged continuing to “think big” and focusing on the small changes that make a difference in peoples’ lives.

Secretary Guerra Abud recalled that the issue of spent-lead acid batteries (SLABs) was brought to his attention by Secretariat representatives when he was leading the environmental transition team following the election of President Peña Nieto. The issue of SLABs was mainly found on the border with the United States due to the import of used car batteries from the US to be recycled in Mexico. Recognizing the importance of employment generated through this recycling industry, he acknowledged the considerable negative environmental and health impact created by the release of lead from these batteries. He thanked the CEC for raising this matter to the attention of Mexico given there is now a new regulation concerning used batteries that is aligned with standards in Canada and the US. He stated that this offered an example of the type of assistance Mexico has been receiving through the CEC for the last 20 years, and that it will be receiving for years to come as agreed by the three Parties.

He noted that the CEC serves to bridge environment and trade issues while focusing on regional cooperation. Through the CEC knowledge and expertise on environmental issues have been shared through projects, publications, participation in activities, public meetings, and exchanges with academia. The CEC has contributed to the creation of a trilateral community in North America to continue tackling common environmental issues in a learning environment. He added in conclusion that the CEC has promoted public participation through the JPAC, an advisory committee comprised of citizens, researchers, and technical experts. Through such participation, transparency in terms of

environmental management is enhanced thus allowing for a better definition of public policies.

Item 7 New Priorities for the CEC in 2015-2020

Item 7.1 Introduction

The chair underlined the significant milestones highlighted as part of the twentieth anniversary. She continued saying it is time to look forward and expressed on behalf of the Council their shared commitment to protect the environment in North America. She officially presented the CEC priorities for 2015-2020 and announced that the Council has decided to focus on three critical priority areas: 1) Climate change and mitigation and adaptation; 2) Green growth; and 3) Sustainable communities and ecosystems.

She also [presented the cross-cutting themes](#) that will serve to focus the work: 1) Learning from and assisting vulnerable groups and local and indigenous communities; 2) Enhancing the alignment of environmental regulatory standards, enforcement and compliance; and 3) Enhancing information sharing, transparency, capacity building and communication. She underlined that these priorities will set the direction for CEC activities over the next five years. The CEC's work will complement the work done within all three countries and positive efforts being made at the international level. She expressed encouragement that priorities agreed upon identify opportunities to engage stakeholders, particularly communities, to achieve solutions to current challenges faced across North America. In closing, she stressed how cross-cutting themes ensured that activities remained grounded in areas important to all.

Item 7.2 Remarks by Gina McCarthy, Administrator, US Environmental Protection Agency

Administrator McCarthy stated she would focus her intervention on the climate change mitigation and adaptation priority. She explained how this priority is significant for the US and that they would like to collaborate much more with Canada and Mexico to take action on climate change. She underscored that climate change is one of the greatest changes of our times and its impacts are blind to borders. It is not just an environmental challenge, but a public health, an economic and a national security challenge, she stated. She explained this is why they needed to work together. She also noted that science is clear and that very little discussion is needed because the impacts of climate change are proven. This is not about a future modeling experience; it is about looking at the damages already done and the causes associated with that, and recognizing that the time to take action is now and that we have a moral obligation to children, she said.

She added that president Obama has identified this matter as a signature and legacy issue of his second term and has developed and released a Climate Action Plan. That plan looks at different areas: 1) adaptation and resilience; and 2) mitigation, which means reducing carbon pollution. She mentioned a US EPA proposal looking particularly at regulating carbon pollution from the power sector given its impact on climate change in the US, and reducing it through lower waste and cleaner ways to generate energy and keeping the energy reliable and affordable, investing in new technologies and innovation. This endeavor will engage every state, she indicated. She added that she would like to use the CEC as a venue to advance those ideas, share lessons learned, talk about possible joint actions, share the science and expertise, and make climate information more available and accessible to people.

She then explained that climate change is also a public health problem given it leads to safety issue in the communities given it results in higher temperatures, increasing ozone and smog impacting the health of children (i.e. 1 in 10 children in the US has chronic asthma). She stressed that this impact is bigger in vulnerable communities and is an opportunity to engage the TEK that communities have to work with them, and to adapt in the future and engage everybody in this work.

She said she believes global change is a global problem that needs global answers; but leaders have to step up. She mentioned that President Obama is one of those leaders. She committed the US to working on different issues engaging and convincing people that economic growth is possible while addressing climate change. In fact if they fail to deal with these matters countries will not have the economic growth they expect to deliver to people. She continued expressing her hope that the CEC create an opportunity to have a larger voice for North America on this global challenge and global solutions that need to be brought to the table.

Item 7.3 Remarks by Juan José Guerra Abud, Mexican Secretary for Environment and Natural Resources

Secretary Guerra Abud explained the link between climate change and green growth, and stated that both topics are in turn related to sustainable communities and ecosystems. He stressed the importance of green growth for Mexico and indicated that one of the priorities for President Peña Nieto is the eradication of poverty in Mexico in order for environmental programs to be efficient in promoting sustainable growth.

He commented that for the last 18 months, President Peña Nieto has led many important reforms to eliminate dogmas and hindrances to the growth and development of Mexico. He listed a few of them: 1) the approval by Congress of a reform enhancing transparency regarding government affairs; 2) a fiscal and financial reform to facilitate the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs); 3) educational reform; 4) a reform against monopoly in the telecommunications sector; and 5) current discussions on the energy reform. There is agreement that these reforms will yield large benefits for Mexicans in terms of investments, employment, and value-added that can be generated due to new opportunities for leading technology companies to invest in the energy sector in Mexico, he said. He expressed his certainty that the environment will be the main beneficiary from the energy reform.

He further explained that the main source of greenhouse gas emissions is from the energy sector, and stressed the importance of developing more technologies and systems to reduce them. He recognized the leadership of President Obama on this matter and stressed that he has the ability to bring other countries to take action on climate change. This is the most important challenges facing humanity in the 21st century, he said. In this regard, the entire world needs to face the issue. He added that green growth is linked to climate change and that generating green growth is crucial for Mexico. He noted that Mexico occupies 1% of the world's surface area while it hosts approximately 10% of its biodiversity. There is much to be learned from indigenous communities regarding the protection of our ecosystems, he added. Finally, he underlined that the work undertaken by the three countries through the CEC will strengthen the region and stimulate growth while protecting the environment.

Item 7.4 Remarks by Leona Aglukkaq, Canadian Environment Minister

She announced she will provide comments on all priorities. On climate change she said that all three countries have committed to addressing this issue in concrete ways and having a direct impact on peoples' lives. She expressed that this particular area supports one of the priorities that Canada has brought forward to the Arctic Council, more particularly in terms of taking action to address short-lived climate pollutants such as black carbon. Taking action on black carbon is also a priority of the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, an international organization Canada has co-founded, she added.

She mentioned that the work of the CEC is invaluable and that the three countries are members and supporter of this particular initiative and that the CEC is an international organization where concrete actions are also supported with deliverables. She added that membership continues to grow under the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to include other countries to deal with the short-lived climate pollutants. Continued collaboration on climate change for the next strategic plan demonstrates how the countries are partner under the banner of the CEC and are committed to work together to find ways to address GHG emissions while supporting economic growth, she said.

She indicated that under the green growth priority the connection between the three countries offers great strength as they work hand-in-hand in order for their economies to grow in a sustainable manner for the benefit of all North Americans and generations to come. She stated that Canada has seen a lot of progress in the area of cleaner energy as it has one of the cleanest electricity systems in the world and more efficient vehicles. This has been partly facilitated through regulations that are expected to result in accumulative reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the first twenty one years, equivalent to removing to 2.6 personal vehicles per year from the roads, she said. Under the green growth priority the CEC will lead the way in bringing together stakeholders to share expertise as well as strategies that support their shared trade and environmental performance.

Under sustainable communities she indicated that as a northerner she understands the fundamental role that communities play in the sustainability of the environment and expressed that remote communities in Canada's North and across North America have learned how to work with their surrounding environment to conserve and use the resources sustainably. The sustainable community ecosystem's priority will allow CEC partners to identify opportunities to learn from average communities and support these communities in sharing best practices at the grassroots level. She stated that for Canada the application of TEK and science in the government's assessment of ecosystems has had a significant impact on the effective development and science-based environmental policies and programs, and activities. She then provided some examples: 1) Canada's world class management system for the polar bear, incorporating both traditional knowledge and science to ensure effective management of the species. She indicated that the management system includes partnerships with local communities, federal government, territorial governments, Inuit organizations and land claim organizations; and 2) The MOU signed in December 2013 by the Arctic coastal states after forty years of cooperation incorporating Inuit and indigenous peoples traditional knowledge in the circumpolar region. She added that the direct engagement of industries is a key element to ensure the regulatory effectiveness in communities in which they operate, meaning that the public private partnerships are leveraged to build better infrastructure and provide opportunities for communities.

In closing, she stated that through the CEC sustainable communities and ecosystem priority, Canada hopes to contribute with its knowledge and experience in working directly with aboriginal

communities. Given the CEC's past work on biodiversity and ecosystems conservation, it is well positioned to support the continued efforts to conserve the environment while building capacity within remote aboriginal communities across North America, she concluded.

She then invited the JPAC chair Bob Varney to moderate the next portion of the agenda.

Item 8 Moderated discussion on TEK and new priorities

Following instructions by the JPAC chair on the conduct of the moderated discussion, Minister Aglukkaq opened the public session by expressing her appreciation of the discussions held on TEK, emphasizing how this subject has been central to her life, as Inuit, as well as to other communities living in the Arctic. She added that TEK shapes how people look at and work within the environment. In her experience, engaging and learning from people who live off the land is a productive way to increase knowledge on arctic resources and the environment, rather than taking a distant look at arctic lifestyles. She underscored her dedication to assessing the complementarity of TEK and modern science, and finding ways of using TEK to generate positive environmental outcomes. One way, according to her, would be to apply TEK at each step of the scientific approach: planning, monitoring and results interpretation. She highlighted the success of incorporating TEK from Inuit communities in the environmental management and decision-making processes, via the Arctic Council. She emphasized that the best conservation outcomes can be achieved by engaging the communities that are most impacted. As an example, she mentioned the progress made in polar bear conservation through the contribution of data users throughout the region.

Secretary Guerra Abud noted that Mexico contains great cultural and biological diversity and, as result, TEK is present in indigenous communities throughout the country. Many of these communities follow traditional and indigenous political and legal frameworks, and rely on indigenous agriculture. TEK represents opportunities and benefits for the Mexican government who is making an effort to include indigenous communities when carrying out environmental impact assessments and permitting economic activities.

“Can the CEC consider and focus on the integration of climate change with human development and habitat protection or loss in fish and marine waters. For example, climate change combined with habitat loss and human development can impact migrating species that need wetlands. Other examples are impacts of sea level rise on coastal ecosystems, infrastructures, communities and culture. Across all situations, could the CEC focus on developing and supporting best practices, modelling, technology, and analytical tools, as well as communications tools and platform?” (Question from Magdalena Muir, Arctic Institute of North America, reading a question from the JPAC networking session.)

Secretary Guerra Abud responded that Mexico has policies in place to address climate change, water availability, and other environmental issues, and it supports the work of the CEC in that area. Minister Aglukkaq answered that climate change was a priority for Canada, as shown in the CEC's new 2015-2020 strategic objectives and other Canadian initiatives outside the CEC (e.g., binational efforts on clean water and lakes). Furthermore, the CEC project on blue carbon, which aims to

quantify the carbon sequestration potential of coastal aquatic vegetation, is an example of CEC support to climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts.

“How can governments better assist tribes and First Nations peoples to address the impact of climate change?”(Question from Mike Durglo, Flathead Reservation, Montana.)

Administrator McCarthy mentioned efforts made and many opportunities at the EPA to 1) provide resources to tribal and indigenous communities to engage them in management decisions that affect their lands; 2) understand the changes that are taking place; 3) learn from their knowledge; and 4) incorporate their suggestions in decision-making. Through that effort, necessary resources have been made available and training has been offered to encourage their participation. She mentioned that the EPA recognizes that tribal communities depend heavily on natural resources, have valuable knowledge and information describing the changes that are happening, and can suggest practices that are best suited to adapt to those changes. She noted that without those communities at the table the status of their lands and successful adaptation solutions would not be fully understood.

“TEK and modern science inform us of ways traditional foods from wildlife animals, plants and traditional agriculture provide healthy food for indigenous communities. How is each country protecting this food biodiversity for use by indigenous people?”(Question from Harriet V. Kuhnlein, McGill University.)

Secretary Guerra Abud mentioned that this theme was controversial in Mexico, specifically regarding transgenic corn. There are many groups who oppose the use of genetically-modified corn, which is regulated under the authority of Semarnat. Minister Aglukkaq added that the Canadian government has put in place measures to protect access to traditional foods and wildlife in Nunavut, using the example of polar bears and seals. She noted that TEK is valuable in filling the knowledge gap that exists in understanding access to traditional food. Finally, Administrator McCarthy added there were many ways by which food biodiversity is impacted, and that more voices could be heard. As an example she mentioned that salmon, on which several Alaskan tribes depend on culturally, can be impacted. The dependency of tribal groups on such resources, as well as their engagement in public discussions, is part of the US Federal Trust Responsibility. Several other examples have demonstrated the importance and value of giving local communities a place at the table in order to provide creative and fair solutions to resource accessibility, she concluded.

“Is there a North American-wide climate change issue for which the application of TEK would be part of the solution?”(Question from Michael Brubaker, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium.)

Minister Aglukkaq stated that the protection of polar bear is a good example of where TEK from arctic countries can be integrated into the action plan, as well as in assessing ice condition and impact on populations. Administrator McCarthy added that citizen science is a good approach for engaging people and increasing data and information sharing, and that institutions must provide capacity building. She continued by saying that the CEC’s blue carbon project addresses an area of climate change where we are just beginning to explore how climate change is impacting oceans and marine environments. The science is not robust, she acknowledged although she indicated that indigenous communities living off those environments have more much information than our

science regarding the changes that are happening. She concluded by saying she is very supportive of applying TEK to the blue carbon project.

“I suggest that the CEC continues the research on indigenous maize, started in 2003-2004, and develops a program to find multicultural and interdisciplinary solutions to healthy and culturally acceptable food production on the basis of TEK.”(Question from Xavier Martinez, *Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental*.)

Secretary Guerra Abud agreed that the CEC would be able to give more information on the subject. The implication of traditional corn contamination by genetically-modified corn is of particular importance to Mexico given the dependency of indigenous communities on native and traditional corn seeds. He stated that such questions relating to biodiversity were regulated by Semarnat.

“As a result of a recent Supreme Court ruling regarding First Nations land titles in British Columbia, the development of resource extraction activities now requires the consent of local aboriginal populations. How will the CEC’s work benefit from this decision and foster First Nations participation, on the basis of TEK and land occupation?” (Question from Marie Ste-Arnaud, Université du Québec à Montréal.)

Minister Aglukkaq mentioned that environmental assessments were required in Canada before authorizing projects. Following the settlement of the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement, several boards were created to participate in those assessments and determine the terms and conditions under which projects will proceed. She noted that some projects in British Columbia did not go forward because they did not meet environmental standards.

“Much of our discussion thus far has centered on identifying mechanisms by which these systems of knowledge can be protected, but also mobilized, to inform broader solutions to our most pressing environmental challenges. Each of the three CEC countries addresses issues of indigenous knowledge very differently. Would the CEC be willing to work toward greater trilateral cooperation for addressing indigenous knowledge and their possible alignment with scientific processes in an attempt to achieve greater parity in how our continent's governments address these issues with their respective aboriginal peoples?”(Question from Chuck Striplen, San Francisco Estuary Institute.)

Administrator McCarthy expressed support for the challenge it represents. She noted that one limitation of environmental assessments was the lack of science to support the understanding of cumulative impacts and that this is something she would be willing to work on.

“Indigenous people’s traditional lifestyles have been maintained through practices that are respectful of nature. How is the CEC responding to the demands made by traditional peoples, and what mechanisms and resources can the CEC provide to help communities address challenges across bioregions?”(Question from Alberto Ruz Buenfil, Ecoaldea Huehucóyotl.)

Secretary Guerra Abud noted that any environmental assessment or land use change in Mexico required an authorization. When a company presents a request, it is made public and Semarnat carries out a public consultation with communities and other stakeholders. In the mining sector,

Mexico would like to implement high sustainable development standards, such as those of Canada. He explained that mined resources create wellbeing and benefits for everyone, and that Semarnat ensures that mining activities are carried out in a sustainable way, with the least impact possible.

“In the Northwest Territories, TEK is well integrated in land use planning. How can TEK be better integrated in land use practices throughout North America?” (Question from Karen Hamre, Protected Areas Strategy.)

Minister Aglukkaq answered that those processes were established in the north through land claims agreements, which calls for the involvement of aboriginal people in the decision-making process. Land use planning is therefore developed with consideration of TEK, acquired by living on the land for thousands of years. She added that every project has an ecological footprint, and the challenge is to mitigate those impacts. In some instances, some projects are not approved and do not proceed. Working with the Arctic Council fostered greater sharing of knowledge from various locations in the Arctic, she said.

“What are you doing to protect TEK, which is often in oral form?” (Question from Dr. Fraser Taylor, Carleton University.)

Minister Aglukkaq agreed with the importance of capturing the oral knowledge, and noted there were efforts in Nunavut to record oral history, improve coordination to gather information, and create a repository of existing information from various universities.

Robert Varney, JPAC chair, concluded the session and thanked the audience and the Council for such great discussions.

Council Session closing

Item 9 Signing of Council Resolution and Ministerial Statement

The chair invited his counterparts to join him in signing Council Resolution 14-08, establishing funding for the CEC for 2015, as well as the following ministerial statement:

Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) Ministerial Statement

Twenty-first Regular Session of the CEC Council

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada, 17 July 2014—Twenty years ago, North American leaders made a commitment that trade and economic growth would go hand-in-hand with effective trilateral cooperation and protection of the environment across the continent.

Today in Yellowknife, at the first Council Session held in northern Canada, we are honoured to continue this legacy as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC) and the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC).

The NAAEC, as a parallel agreement to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), has represented a novel approach for the three countries to support cooperation on shared environmental issues and has been built upon in other free trade and environment agreements over the past two decades.

The CEC, established under the NAAEC, is a unique institution, and its accomplishments are something of which we can all be proud. The CEC has allowed us to leverage our collective knowledge, resources and expertise to enhance collaboration amongst our three governments, engage with the public, and promote partnerships with communities as we join efforts to protect and enhance our shared environment.

New Priorities

This meeting is also a time to look forward. Building on our 20 years of experience and successes, and responding to our regional and global challenges, we will focus on three priority areas for the CEC 2015–2020 Strategic Plan:

1. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation;
2. Green Growth; and
3. Sustainable Communities and Ecosystems.

We have agreed on these priorities based on our trilateral engagement, as well as input from the public outreach efforts of our Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC). These priorities address key regional environmental challenges and complement the work each of our governments do domestically and internationally, ensuring the CEC's role as a value-added organization for each of our countries, in line with the commitments made by our leaders at the North American Leaders' Summit meeting in Toluca, Mexico, in February 2014.

Cooperation initiatives, projects and actions under these priorities will be guided by three important cross-cutting themes:

- learning from and assisting vulnerable groups and local and indigenous communities;
- enhancing the alignment of environmental standards and regulations, enforcement, and compliance to promote environmental protection and facilitate trade in North America; and
- enhancing information sharing, transparency, capacity building, and communication.

As we develop a five-year strategic plan for consideration at next year's Council Session, these themes, as outlined in the attached diagram, will continue to guide our efforts.

TEK

This year also marks the first time that the Council Session has been held in Canada's North. Yellowknife's spectacular natural setting further emphasizes the critical importance of the CEC and the need to protect unique communities and ecosystems across North America.

During today's moderated discussion on TEK, we highlighted the valuable and integral contribution that local and indigenous communities can provide to our environmental management activities. Within each of our three new priorities, Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation, Green Growth, and Sustainable Communities and Ecosystems, we intend to work effectively with local and indigenous communities across North America to enhance our understanding of the environment and make effective environmental management decisions.

We also recognize the importance of preserving the traditional knowledge and practices of local and indigenous communities that contribute to addressing the effects of climate change, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources and biological diversity.

Submission on Enforcement Matters

This year, we implemented a new reporting approach for submissions on enforcement matters (SEM) as part of our continued commitment to transparency and to the SEM modernization process. Following a proposal by the Joint Public Advisory Committee, each country provided an update on actions taken in connection with submissions concluded in the past year.

The Parties reported on the following submissions: Quebec Automobiles and Protection of Polar Bears for Canada, Coal-fired Power Plants for the United States, and Lake Chapala II for Mexico. We look forward to maintaining this reporting approach at next year's CEC Council Session, and beyond.

Looking to the Future of Environmental Cooperation

As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the CEC and the NAAEC, we continue to collaborate to protect and enhance the North American environment for the well-being of present and future generations.

The work of the CEC remains as important now as it did 20 years ago. As the economic, trade, and social links between our three countries continue to deepen, the NAAEC and the CEC will remain key to our collective success.

We look forward to the 2015 Council Session in the United States.

Item 10 Closing Remarks by Secretary Guerra Abud

Secretary Guerra Abud congratulated Minister Aglukkaq and the Government of Canada for their excellent work done under their chairmanship last year. He wished the best to Administrator McCarthy as the new chair. He also thanked the entire CEC staff and Irasema Coronado for all their work.

Item 11 Concluding remarks and Passing the Torch by Minister Aglukkaq

Minister Aglukkaq shared her pride in having hosted the meeting in Canada's North as she hoped it was beneficial. She thanked the organizers and the Secretariat staff for the work done in ensuring its success. She thanked all the participants and the people from Yellowknife for hosting and entertaining the delegations. She mentioned that she was trying to carry out as many meetings in the North as possible to stimulate an appreciation for Canada's Arctic.

She stated that the three countries have a lot of work ahead, common challenges to face, and that the cooperation under the CEC is exceptional. She said she is looking forward to the next session and announced that the US will be chairing the meeting.

She thanked her colleagues for being there and expressed appreciation for the work they are doing together and the great results that are yielded. She also expressed gratitude to JPAC members and acknowledged the importance of the outreach they do and the information and advice they provide that helps the Council make better decisions. On the issue of TEK, she underlined how this focus will bring a different perspective and will add value to the CEC's work. She thanked everyone again and passed the torch to her colleague, Administrator McCarthy.

Item 12 New Council chair and Announcement of 2014 Council Session by Administrator McCarthy

Administrator McCarthy thanked everyone for this successful session and expressed pleasure in having participated with her colleagues. She underscored that experience has shown that cooperation is always the key to making good decisions and to sustainability. She stressed that the future of the three countries is linked and that decision making should also be linked. The three countries really have to respond to the challenges they are facing and show some leadership because that is what is expected and that is what the countries need. The world needs that kind of honesty and direction to move forward, she said.

She said she was very inspired to be working with two courageous leaders and that as leaders in their respective countries they try to inspire their constituencies. This forum represents an opportunity where, beyond North America, they can inspire the world. She shared their collective excitement in the work ahead, celebrating twenty years of past successes and moving forward. She indicated it was a privilege for the US and for her personally to take on the torch from Minister Aggluqaq given her tremendous leadership.

She assured that the US will work hard across the federal government. She shared it had been wonderful for her to get to know the Northwestern Territories. In closing, she announced that the next Council Session in 2015 will take place in Boston, Massachusetts.

The Twenty-First Regular Session of the Council of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation was officially adjourned.