

July 15, 2022

CANADA'S NATIONAL ADAPTATION STRATEGY

Brief submitted by the Group of 78 and Climate Legacy

Overarching point: the proposed strategic framework is inadequate

1. We are delighted the Federal Government has decided to hold consultations in framing a National Climate Adaptation Strategy for Canada. We address the following overarching issues raised by the discussion paper. Overall, our view is that the proposed elements of a draft strategy are inadequate because:
 - a. they lack urgency given the nature and scale of the existential threats posed by the climate crisis;
 - b. adaptation needs to be clearly linked to a mitigation strategy that succeeds in halting global warming;
 - c. the strategy must be global, not just national in scope, and advocate much greater support for adaptation in the poorest countries;
 - d. the strategic framework should include Agriculture and Food Security, adopt the model of the circular economy, and include a financing plan; and
 - e. adaptation strategy should be tied to the closely related goal of strengthening and protecting biodiversity.

2. Scope of the strategy. All countries including Canada are faced with climate-related disaster, whether in the form of flooding, violent storms, excessive heat, wildfires, or drought. The world's poorest countries are least responsible for causing the climate crisis yet suffer some of its worst consequences. Canada's adaptation strategy should thus be global in scope. Canada and the Global North have a moral obligation to support the poorest countries in their struggle to build resilience. The failure of adaptation in such countries could have a number of adverse consequences for Canada and the world. It could, among other things, add to the rising tide of climate refugees, exacerbate global food insecurity, and foment further political instability and conflict.

Actions we recommend: at least double Canada's contribution to the UN climate fund, with at least 50 percent allocated to adaptation; work bilaterally and multilaterally with vulnerable countries in the Global South to help them formulate adaptation plans; work multilaterally to ease conditions for countries to access funding quickly; work with other

developed countries to arrange multilateral funding for damage and loss by countries seriously affected by northern-driven climate change. (See also point 6 below on financing adaptation.)

3. In defining an adaptation strategy, reference needs to be made to mitigation and decarbonization policies. Adaptation and Mitigation are not substitutes but complementary tools—Mitigation is “playing offence” against the causes of Climate Crisis; Adaptation is “playing defence” against its consequences. Both defensive and offensive strategies are crucial in winning the war against Climate Change. This implies that resources committed to adaptation should be additional to those committed to mitigation.
4. However, if global warming continues to rise unchecked, there should also be greater recognition of the limitations of adaptation actions (in the words of the discussion paper) “to enhance our well-being and safety, promote justice, equity, and Indigenous reconciliation, and secure a thriving environment and economy for future generations”. Adaptation in a world where warming reaches 3.5 degrees C. would be very difficult, if not impossible, for human civilization and much life on the planet as we now know it.
5. The general tenor of the paper lacks urgency. Over the past several years, Canadian communities in every part of the country have been hit by climate-related disasters, sometimes tragically. Lives have been lost; properties devastated; livelihoods threatened. Particularly if global warming continues unchecked, such emergencies are likely to become even more intense and more frequent. The discussion paper too often invokes lofty principles and goals for the distant future. To protect lives and property, and to limit the damage from climate disaster, Canada and the world need an adaptation strategy now, not one that will take a decade or more to put in place, as proposed by the paper.
6. The organizing framework is incomplete. Five “systems” (Health and well-being; Natural environment; Infrastructure; Disaster resilience; Economic resilience) are proposed as a way of organizing the strategy. This leaves out Agriculture and Food Security (including food from all sources, e.g., fishing) which is increasingly viewed as critically vulnerable in the climate crisis, both nationally and globally. We recommend that Regenerative Agriculture and Food Security be added as a sixth “system” to the organizing framework.

The adaptation strategy also needs a section on climate finance, for the enormous efforts that will be needed to mobilize and direct funding from many quarters for the many sectors of the strategy. The sources should include finance from all levels of government – federal, provincial, and municipal – as well as the private sector. Even non-profits, charities and community organizations could be included to constitute a genuine “whole of Canada” effort. Tax incentives for adaptation could be added to direct funding in the financing plan. A financial plan to accompany an adaptation strategy should also include means to assist climate vulnerable peoples in the Global South (see section 1 above).

7. The framework should also incorporate the model of the circular economy to better confront upcoming environmental challenges. The current linear model is unsustainable, and we must transform our economic system voluntarily while we still have the luxury to do so. It is vital to invest massively in recycling facilities and to promote initiatives that target the re-use of materials. Extensive research and development will be required to design new products which are much easier to recycle. As virgin resources become scarcer, Canada has the capacity to invest in a closed loop economy and should show leadership in its pursuit. Adopting such an economic model would not only create a more sustainable economy, but would also develop new sectors, create new jobs and generate new capabilities, thus stimulating our economy. The circular economy model includes, but goes beyond, the “resilient economy” system proposed in the discussion paper.

8. The adaptation strategy needs to be linked to biodiversity loss. The planet’s health and human health are closely linked. The accelerated and alarming loss of biodiversity in the past half century has resulted from climate deterioration. In turn, biodiversity loss dramatically and measurably erodes the resilience of human societies and their well-being. Any strategy to address climate change, including adaptation, must therefore entail serious efforts to reverse the direction for biodiversity. Policy-making here should be guided by the “[One Health](#)” approach, which encompasses human health, animal health and the health of the environment more generally. Concerted action to curb biodiversity loss will have direct and substantial benefit for the climate, economies, and human well-being. Two measures among many that we would recommend are the creation of eco-security councils at all levels of government; and increased support to the Global South for planning and action to protect biodiversity.

Concluding Remarks

The discussion paper:

- Needs to propose a credible global strategy demonstrating international leadership, recognizing poor countries' plight in the climate crisis, and their need for massive international public spending to support adaptation; and
- Is insufficient even to provide the basis of a national adaptation strategy, without:
 - linking it to a successful mitigation strategy,
 - a financing plan,
 - explicitly including agriculture and food security,
 - integrating the model of the circular economy,
 - linking it to the crucial challenge of biodiversity loss, and
 - a communications plan to engage with the public on the challenges of climate change, the options and implications, and progress toward targets.

A successful strategy must demonstrate: leadership, urgency and recognition of the need to steward nature. This demands respect for, and preserving, biodiversity, and as the discussion paper recognizes, it requires calling on indigenous communities for their wisdom, advice and partnership.

It demands addressing this existential crisis as if it were a real emergency.

Since its origins in 1981, the Group of 78 has promoted dialogue about a progressive Canadian foreign policy, based on the principles of sustainable peace through common security; economic and social justice in prosperity; and survival of our planet in the face of modern human activity. Adaptation to climate change, was our particular focus and the topic of our 2021 annual policy conference, held in late September (<https://group78.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021-G78-Key-messages-and-recommendations-EN-FR.pdf>). Climate Legacy is a project of the Group of 78 launched in 2019 to engage and mobilize older Canadians in climate action through their voice, their time and their money.