

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY

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THE CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AGENCY

ON BEHALF OF

THE HONOURABLE DAVID ANDERSON, P.C., M.P.,

MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT

TO THE 24TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT

SHERATON VANCOUVER WALL CENTRE HOTEL

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(COMPARE AGAINST DELIVERY)

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and on behalf of the Government of Canada, welcome to Vancouver and the annual conference of the International Association for Impact Assessment. I am delighted to be here this morning on behalf of the Honourable David Anderson, Minister of the Environment who unfortunately had a previous commitment. Minister Anderson sends his regrets and has asked me to extend his best wishes for a successful conference.

Let me begin by saying how pleased I am that the Government of Canada is supporting the 2004 conference, along with the three Canadian affiliates of the IAIA — l'Association québécoise pour l'évaluation d'impacts, the Ontario Association for Impact Assessment and the Western and Northern Canada affiliate. I am told it has been a decade since we last hosted this important annual event, going back to 1994 in Quebec City. It's great to have you back.

Canada is proud to host IAIA's 2004 conference. We are equally proud of the range of expert speakers who will share their knowledge and insight with delegates from around the world. Fifteen federal departments and agencies are involved in the conference, demonstrating a tremendous range and depth of support for impact assessment and sustainable development.

I trust that you have had the opportunity to drop by the Canada exhibit to learn more about what some of these organizations are doing.

I know Minister Anderson was disappointed that he was unable to attend. First, a little known fact is that he worked as a consultant on one of the first impact assessments ever undertaken in this part of the world — the review of the Alyeska pipeline in Alaska in the early 1970s. He has some genuine first-hand knowledge of the concept and the principles behind EIA. He has seen the process evolve and improve over the past 30 years — in fact, as Minister of the Environment, he was the driving force behind recent changes to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*. I will have more to say about that in a few minutes.

Minister Anderson also wanted to be here because he recognizes the strategic role of IAIA as the leading global authority on best practices in the use of impact assessment. This conference typically attracts environmental decision makers, industry and community leaders, and professional practitioners

from approximately 75 member countries of the IAIA. The Minister is also pleased that a number of indigenous groups are represented at the conference. Aboriginal people in Canada and elsewhere are becoming increasingly involved in and affected by development projects, and here in Canada administer their own environmental assessment regimes in some areas of the country. Recent changes to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* formally recognize the value of traditional knowledge in conducting environmental assessments.

As you know, Canada has traditionally played a strong leadership role in the IAIA; we recognize the value of international collaboration and dialogue on many issues, including the environment. Several Canadians have received the IAIA's prestigious Rose-Hulman Award for a lifetime of distinguished work in the environmental assessment field — most recently Dr. Shirley Conover in 2002. Other Canadian recipients include Professor Husain Sadar (1998), Barry Sadler (1996), Robert Goodland (1993), the Canadian Environmental Assessment Research Council (1991), Gordon Beanlands (1988) and Thomas Berger (1987). Canadian environmentalist Maurice Strong was the recipient of the inaugural Global Environment Award in 2001, and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency received the Institutional Award in 1995.

IAIA President Richard Morgan, writing in the conference preliminary program, described Canada as being “a leading champion of impact assessment over the past three decades and having a great deal of experience in the use of impact assessment in relation to major industrial and resource developments.” Those are flattering words, so I'm glad someone else used them! But just the same, I'm not going to deny that Canada is proud of its leadership and achievements in developing and promoting innovative, practical impact assessment methodologies.

Although impact assessment is a relatively new decision-making process — it's been around for only about 30 years — it has caught on remarkably well. It is now part of public decision making at all levels of government in Canada, as it is in most countries and, increasingly, in international organizations. The World Bank, for example, is a leader in the field. As new science and practices for impact assessment have evolved, they have been quickly shared around the world. The IAIA deserves much of the credit for this.

Canadians have embraced environmental assessment because we recognize that it allows us to better integrate our environmental goals with our economic, social and cultural values — in other words, it is an indispensable planning tool for sustainable development. Given the nature of our economy, with its strong resource base, the pursuit of sustainable development is a day-to-day challenge in this country. It is also a priority for our Government.

In fact, the Government of Canada regards sustainable development as a prerequisite for future prosperity. We believe that a strong economy and a healthy environment can and must co-exist — and we view environmental assessment as a critical mechanism for achieving this balance.

We also know what the results can be when the opposite of sustainable development occurs — when we fail to properly assess the environmental impact of a development project. I'm sure all of you can point to situations in your own countries where environmental assessment could have prevented an environmental calamity. Here in Canada, the Sydney Tar Ponds in Nova Scotia come quickly to mind. Had this project been properly assessed in the first place, we would not today be faced with an environmental liability that demands attention and a huge investment of public dollars.

When you look at it strictly from a business perspective — from a dollars and cents point of view — environmental assessment makes tremendous sense. It typically costs less than one percent of a project's total cost to conduct an assessment. And the environmental and socio-economic benefits that can arise from an assessment far outweigh the cost of doing it. So when your conference theme asks "Impact Assessment for Industrial Development: Whose Business Is It?" we say emphatically, it is everyone's business because everyone benefits from high-quality environmental assessments that contribute to informed decision making.

Last year alone, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency supported federal departments and agencies in conducting about 7 000 environmental assessments under the authority of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*. Since the Act became law in 1995, more than 50 000 projects have been assessed.

You can imagine the scope of this activity. Many of the assessed projects are minor, and in some cases we have developed class screening models that streamline the assessment process for projects of a similar nature, such as routine fish habitat restoration and enhancement projects. At the same time, we have tackled some very large and complex assessments, with excellent results for the environment, for industry and for local communities.

The environmental review of the Diavik Diamond Mine in the Northwest Territories is a case in point. That review led to the development of an environmental management framework to protect the health of the territorial environment and those who depend on it, while supporting timely development and resource management decisions that created well-paying, skilled jobs in a part of Canada where the unemployment rate is unacceptably high. It also outlined steps that should be taken to ensure the well-being of the Bathurst Caribou Herd, which was a major concern of all stakeholders.

Environmental assessment also improved the design of the Confederation Bridge between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick — the longest bridge over ice-covered waters in the world. The assessment took climate change considerations into account. After careful scientific study and modelling, the bridge piers were reduced in number and re-designed to permit normal ice break-up in the spring. Without these changes, ice would likely have been trapped in the Northumberland Strait longer than usual each year, causing temperatures onshore to drop below seasonable norms and disrupting the growing season in an area where agriculture is an important industry. We did the science, made the right decisions, and as a result the entire project is more sustainable.

Canada's commitment to sustainable development was reaffirmed on February 2nd in the Speech from the Throne, which as you may know lays out the Government's social, political and economic agenda for the coming term. This year's Throne Speech — the first for our new Prime Minister, the Honourable Paul Martin — featured many important elements. It talked about strengthening Canada's social foundations; about building a 21st century economy; about ensuring that Canada's voice in the world is one of pride and influence; about changing the

way government works. But tellingly, it also talked about ensuring that sustainable development is at the core of government decision making.

Prime Minister Martin firmly believes that sustainable development offers a critical perspective through which we can take a new and more coherent approach to foreign policy, health policy and economic policies. He knows that if we continue to exceed the earth's biological carrying capacity, future generations simply won't have any chance of a decent life. Our government views environmental assessment not as a barrier to development, but as an enabler of sustainable development, both domestically and globally. Environmental assessment is not bad for business — it is how we do business better in the new century than we did in the past 100 years.

Of course, in a nation as large and varied as Canada — a politically and geographically diverse federation of 10 provinces and three territories — no level of government can carry the mantle of sustainable development alone. Environmental stewardship is a shared responsibility, and ensuring that development projects undergo appropriate review before the shovel hits the ground requires cooperation, understanding and respect.

In addition to the federal process that is laid out in the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, all provincial and territorial governments have their own environmental assessment regimes. Aboriginal governments in Canada are also taking on new responsibilities for environmental assessment on lands that fall under their jurisdiction as a result of land claim or self-government agreements. In this multi-jurisdictional environment, when development projects cross boundaries or jurisdictions, overlap and duplication are almost inevitable. Yet more and more, we are seeing a willingness by all parties to enter into cooperation agreements that promote co-ordination of environmental assessment regimes, so that duplication can be avoided. There's more work to be done on this front, but we are moving forward.

An ongoing challenge in Canada — as I am sure it is elsewhere — is the need to balance environmental assessment efficiency, quality and effectiveness. We believe we've made some

significant progress in this regard through a series of amendments to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* that will improve the quality of decision making and move us further toward the goal of sustainable development.

Those changes were not developed behind closed doors — they arose out of a formal review of the Act that engaged everyone from environmental groups and industry to Aboriginal people, the provinces, other federal departments, academics and the general public.

I'm not going to go into details about all of the amendments.

I suggest that you speak to various staff members of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency who are here at the conference or manage the booth in the exhibit area where you can also obtain printed materials for your information.

It will take some time for all of these changes to take root, but in the meantime the practice of impact assessment will continue to evolve in new and different ways. The practice of strategic environmental assessment, for example, is a more recent development that is gaining momentum in Canada. A Cabinet Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment issued in 1999 requires that environmental considerations must now be incorporated in the development of new federal policies, plans and programs. As of January 1, 2004, departments and agencies are required to issue public statements of environmental effects when a strategic environmental assessment has been conducted.

Canada is also taking steps to integrate climate change considerations into environmental assessments. This has become a significant issue in Canada, with our recent ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. Incorporating climate change considerations in environmental assessments can help authorities determine whether projects are consistent with actions that are being taken to manage greenhouse gas emissions. It can also help proponents identify and implement best practices for adapting to possible climate change impacts, such as more frequent and intense extreme weather events or increases in mean temperatures.

Last November, a federal-provincial-territorial committee chaired by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency issued a document that provides environmental assessment

practitioners with general guidance for incorporating climate change considerations in project assessments. The guidance marks a unique initiative in Canada's response to climate change.

Canadians expect government to take a leadership role on issues like climate change and sustainable development, and I sincerely believe our government is doing that. Providing leadership does not imply that you are acting alone, but rather working in partnership with others. We are all in this together, and we must continue to work together — government and industry, environmentalists and communities and nation to nation — to achieve the kind of balance between environmental, social and economic imperatives that will allow future generations to prosper.

Conferences such as this one can help us forge and strengthen these partnerships. In a world of constant change and turmoil, organizations like the International Association for Impact Assessment and their affiliates around the world confirm that we have the expertise, the foresight and the commitment to manage for sustainability.

In closing, I would like to leave you with an ancient North American Native proverb that so wisely and succinctly reminds us of the big picture: "We do not inherit the earth from our forefathers, we borrow it from our children."

Thank you again for making the trip to Vancouver, and best wishes with the rest of the conference and all of your future work.