

Environmental Stewardship and an Effective Strategy to Confront Climate Change

Climate change is fast becoming the pre-eminent public issue of our time — in Canada and across the planet. It is already causing severe impacts on ecosystems worldwide, and on the millions of people who depend on them for survival. There is a scientific consensus that these effects will become more devastating without substantial reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Prime Minister Harper has acknowledged that “climate change is perhaps the biggest threat to confront the future of humanity today,”¹ and that “we need to take action, we owe it to future generations.”²

A 2006 study for the British government by former World Bank chief economist Nicholas Stern reported that climate change could cost the world economy \$7 trillion annually if greenhouse gas emissions aren’t reduced substantially. This is equivalent to about \$1,000 a year for every person on earth — and far more than the costs of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

In Canada, urgent action is required to address climate change. But we must also address other important environmental challenges if we are to preserve a clean, healthy environment for Canadians today and tomorrow.

Clean air, clean water, vibrant agriculture, secure energy access, unique wildlife and world-famous parks all illustrate the fundamental importance of environmental sustainability to the prosperity and quality of life cherished by Canadians and admired and envied worldwide. However, we can no longer take such “natural capital” for granted. We have already witnessed a rapid deterioration in the cleanliness of our air, mounting evidence of links between human illness and environmental pollution, and increasing threats to our remaining wild spaces and diversity of species.

The good news is that the solutions to these severe environmental problems will also lead to important economic, social, human health, and environmental benefits for Canadians. Our society is faced with unacceptably high levels of poverty and increased inequality. The AFB presents initiatives that will address the environmental challenges while supporting low-income households, workers, and communities in the transition to socially and environmentally sustainable economy. To that end, the AFB will implement a comprehensive environmental plan³ to address the environmental challenges Canada faces and

to advance Canada towards being an international environmental leader.

Canada can only take advantage of the “unprecedented opportunity” to which Prime Minister Harper has referred by taking ambitious actions now to put a price on pollution and the depletion of non-renewable resources, and to invest in critical environmental conservation, supported by strategic regulatory measures.

Notes

1 Speech by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Berlin, Germany, on June 4, 2007. <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?category=2&id=1681>

2 Speech by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Sydney, Australia, on September 7, 2007. <http://www.ecoaction.gc.ca/speeches-discours/20070907-eng.cfm>.

3 See Green Budget Coalition (2007): *Big Steps Forward: Recommendations for Budget 2008*, available at <http://www.greenbudget.ca/2008/main.html>, for more details on many of these specific recommendations.