

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## COMMUNIQUÉ

**Pictou, June 10, 2002** - At the Council of Atlantic Premiers meeting in Pictou, Nova Scotia, premiers vowed to continue their aggressive approach to regional cooperation designed to improve public services and reduce barriers to business within the region. At the meeting, premiers also outlined their priorities for the upcoming Annual Premiers' Conference, scheduled for Halifax, Nova Scotia, in early August. The Atlantic premiers agreed to bring a strong and united voice to a number of national issues including:

- the growing fiscal imbalance between the federal government and the provinces, which diminishes provinces' ability to deliver key programs;
- new federal investments in health, post secondary education, and other social programs;
- the need for a more aggressive approach by the federal government in international trade relations; and
- the necessity of addressing climate change.

### **Regional Cooperation**

Premiers received a six-month progress report on the implementation of *Working Together for Atlantic Canada: An Action Plan for Regional Cooperation*, released in November 2001. The *Plan* encompasses more than thirty specific initiatives, spanning several key sectors. Premiers were presented with an overview of accomplishments that demonstrate success to date. Highlights of the presentation to premiers include an update on the progress of the Atlantic Expert Advisory Committee to undertake joint drug reviews, noting this process is now being used as a model for a national process; the first Atlantic Energy Ministers' Forum, held in Charlottetown last month, at which provinces agreed to work together to clarify and harmonize energy regulations; and the formal establishment of the Atlantic Provinces Community College Consortium to assist colleges and governments in providing the most effective and efficient college programming.

Premiers renewed their commitment to work together on new fronts of government-to-government cooperation in areas such as

- the recruitment and retention of immigrants to the region;
- securities regulations to promote small capital pool development;
- collaboration to press the federal government to promote increased competition in the airline industry by allowing foreign carriers greater air access to Atlantic Canada; and

- regional cooperation on security and transborder issues, including adequate federal funding arrangements.

### **Fiscal Arrangements**

Premiers reiterated their position on equalization during their meeting, and called on the federal government to immediately strengthen the program so that it meets its constitutional commitment. They agree that the federal Equalization Program is not working as well as it should to advance Atlantic Canada's interests and their provinces' ability to contribute most effectively to Canada.

Premiers agreed that a top priority at the upcoming Annual Premiers' Conference would be fiscal arrangements—especially the need to immediately strengthen the Equalization Program. Premiers commended the Senate Finance Committee's report, released in March, which recommends reforms to the Program such as the removal of the ceiling on Equalization and the restoration of a ten-province standard. These reforms are core elements of the Atlantic premiers' position. Provincial and territorial leaders from across Canada have called for action on these issues. Premiers noted that reforms are needed to ensure Atlantic Canadians have access to public services, such as health and education, that are comparable to those available in other parts of Canada. The availability of comparable services also supports the economic competitiveness of the region. Premiers thanked Senator Lowell Murray, chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Finance, for coming to the region to present the report.

Premiers also directed their finance ministers to meet with the new federal finance minister to inform him of the need to strengthen the Equalization Program, to restore the federal funding share for health care, post-secondary education, and other social programs through the CHST, and for both orders of government to work together to facilitate economic development in the region.

### **Energy**

Premiers endorsed the Atlantic energy ministers' efforts to advance regional cooperation in the energy sector. The highly successful e21 Energy Forum of the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers, hosted by New Brunswick, has led the premiers to agree to bring forward a recommendation to establish a New England Governors/Eastern Canadian Premiers' working group to synchronize energy regulations across Eastern Canada and New England.

### **Climate Change**

Premiers unanimously expressed their commitment to address climate change, and recognized the need for governments to work together to aggressively pursue emissions reductions and environmental sustainability. Under the auspices of the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers, Atlantic Canadian provinces are

implementing several specific initiatives to reduce emissions and to explore new and emerging energy sources. Premiers urged the federal government to ensure the upcoming consultation process on climate change results in a comprehensive assessment of the impacts on provinces and territories. Premiers also noted that no province and territory should bear an unreasonable burden in addressing climate change.

### **Trade**

Premiers called for national leadership on improving international trade relations. While focusing on the international level, premiers urged the federal government to terminate negotiation of a European Free Trade Agreement, and to protect the interests of the Atlantic region's salmon aquaculture industry against Chilean dumping and other unfair trade practices. The United States Farm Bill and softwood lumber issues were cited as problematic to open cross border trade. Premiers also agreed to call upon the federal government to consider implementing custodial management of fisheries to ensure compliance of fishing nations to the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) conservation rules.

Premiers noted the importance of domestic trade as well, and their intent to ask all provinces to work more actively to improve the Agreement on Internal Trade in order to improve the investment climate and to reduce interprovincial barriers to business.

Premiers discussed the success of their recent trade mission to New York and agreed it provides a good example of concrete results for Atlantic Canadian business through joint initiatives, and the cooperation of the four Atlantic provinces with the federal government. Premiers agreed to continue the Team Canada Atlantic model in the near future.

### **Skills**

Premiers reinforced their commitment to strengthening labour market training and skills development. The Atlantic provinces have been engaged in numerous interprovincial education initiatives. The premiers' *Action Plan* established new goals for collaboration in the post-secondary sector and labour market development. Regional priorities include student financial assistance, student and labour mobility, and program accessibility through on-line learning.

Premiers welcome greater collaboration with the federal government in areas that support provincial priorities and programs. Joint federal-provincial-territorial efforts to improve student financial assistance, and to increase training opportunities are desirable. Premiers urged the federal government to demonstrate flexibility in improving labour market development agreements in Atlantic Canada. Premiers noted federal investment in communications infrastructure and connectivity should also be enhanced.

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