

A stylized map of Atlantic Canada, including parts of the Maritime provinces and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, rendered in white and light blue against a darker blue background. The map shows the outlines of the provinces and the surrounding water bodies.

Working Together for Atlantic Canada

**An Action Plan
for Regional
Co-operation**

2001 - 2003



THE COUNCIL OF
ATLANTIC PREMIERS
LE CONSEIL DES PREMIERS
MINISTRES DE L'ATLANTIQUE



As the four Premiers of Atlantic Canada, we are pleased to present this document, entitled *Working Together for Atlantic Canada*, which sets out our regional co-operation agenda for the next two years.

When we established the Council of Atlantic Premiers we committed to work together on behalf of Atlantic Canadians to:

- strengthen the economic competitiveness of the region;
- improve the quality of public services to Atlantic Canadians; and/or
- improve the cost-effectiveness of delivering public services to Atlantic Canadians.

Working Together for Atlantic Canada sets out the co-operation initiatives that will be pursued by the four Atlantic provinces over the next two years. This is not a static document—it will be updated continuously to reflect new initiatives to be undertaken to meet changing needs and new opportunities.

In order to be successful, regional co-operation must be a dynamic, ever-evolving endeavour. The actions outlined in this document are not intended to be a finite list—rather, they build upon past and existing initiatives. New opportunities will continue to be explored and acted upon in an ongoing, continuous process. *Working Together for Atlantic Canada* is simply another step in the Council of Atlantic Premiers' commitment to further the interests of all Atlantic Canadians.

As the four Premiers of Atlantic Canada, we are committed to regional collaboration and co-operation in the best interests of our provinces and our people. By working together, we can build a stronger regional economy and more effectively meet the needs of the people we serve.

Bernard Lord, Premier
New Brunswick

Roger Grimes, Premier
Newfoundland and Labrador

John Hamm, Premier
Nova Scotia

Pat Binns, Premier
Prince Edward Island

Working Together for Atlantic Canada
An Action Plan for Regional Co-operation

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Working Together for Atlantic Canada

An Action Plan for Regional Co-operation

1. Introduction

Atlantic Canada's strong sense of community has helped to build and sustain this region for hundreds of years. The four Atlantic provinces share similar social and historical roots, a tradition of regional trading relationships, and have often spoken with a unified voice within Confederation. This co-operative character persists within the region even today in the face of national and global forces.

In keeping with this shared sense of purpose, the Council of Atlantic Premiers presents *Working Together for Atlantic Canada: An Action Plan for Regional Co-operation*. This action plan builds upon a foundation of partnership and regional unity. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island were the first three provinces in Canada to pursue regional co-operation in a formal manner with the establishment more than three decades ago of the Council of Maritime Premiers. Regional ties became even stronger in May 2000 when Newfoundland and Labrador joined, forming a new Council of Atlantic Premiers. The Council of Atlantic Premiers was formalized by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in which all four Premiers expressed their common desire to:

- co-operate for the benefit of the residents of Atlantic Canada;
- enhance existing mechanisms for co-operation and communication between the provinces; and
- commit to establishing a framework for joint development of an Atlantic Canada approach to national issues.

The Atlantic provinces are committed to developing a climate in which Atlantic Canadians can fully participate and compete in the global economy, benefit from similar levels of quality public services as other Canadians, and continue to enjoy the quality of life and environment that is unique to this region.

2. *Building on a Foundation of Regional Partnership and Unity*

This action plan developed by the Council of Atlantic Premiers is an extension of interprovincial co-operation in the tradition of the Council of Maritime Premiers. As the predecessor to the Council of Atlantic Premiers, the Council of Maritime Premiers became the first agency of its kind in Canada that sought to identify and exploit opportunities for maximizing the benefits to their citizens through joint action among provincial governments. Some of the most notable successes include:

- co-operation in education through the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF) and the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC);
- an agreement on co-operation in emergencies providing for the development of compatible emergency management arrangements and co-operation in the coordination of emergency operations; and
- the implementation of an *Atlantic Procurement Agreement* removing trade barriers among Atlantic governments on purchases of goods, services, and construction.

Since the establishment of the Council of Atlantic Premiers eighteen months ago, Premiers have publicly and collectively used this forum to:

- advocate the sustainability of health care;
- call for reform of the federal Equalization Program;
- defend the Atlantic Canadian/US softwood lumber agreement;
- request the federal government to pass new airline regulatory legislation to encourage competition;
- urge the federal government to establish a national shipbuilding and marine fabrication policy;
- harmonize the framework for regulating the licensing and sale of insurance products in the region; and
- collectively build international trade opportunities for Atlantic businesses through the Team Canada Atlantic trade partnership.

Atlantic Premiers are pleased with the ongoing success of Team Canada Atlantic trade missions. More than 150 Atlantic Canadian companies have participated in joint missions to New England from 1999 to 2001, followed by a May 2001 mission to Atlanta, Georgia. These missions have created new business partnerships, increased trade and investment, and helped build strategic alliances between businesses in Atlantic Canada and those of our most important trading partner, the United States. New markets have been tentatively identified as New York and Chicago. Further market research and consultations are underway to confirm the new target

areas and to determine specific opportunities for Atlantic Canadian companies. Team Canada Atlantic is an excellent example of successful co-operation between the federal government and the four Atlantic provinces. Atlantic Premiers are committed to this concept and look forward to the next series of Team Canada Atlantic trade missions.

The Atlantic Premiers are also committed to exploring a number of specific trade and investment opportunities. For example, Premiers will direct their ministers of environment to work more closely together through the Team Atlantic-Environment Partnership to increase the level of trade for Atlantic-based companies involved in environmental technologies and expertise.

Additionally, Atlantic Premiers are pleased with the success of the Atlantic Canada Tourism Partnership in increasing both tourism visitations across the region and expenditures from international markets. Building on the unique characteristics of each province and a number of joint product development initiatives, Premiers are committed to further develop opportunities for regional co-operation in tourism development.

Working Together for Atlantic Canada: An Action Plan for Regional Co-operation is a continuation of efforts among the four Atlantic provinces to strengthen regional ties, break down barriers to trade and business, and work co-operatively for the benefit of all Atlantic Canadians.

3. *Towards a Regional Action Plan*

With the signing of the MOU, the Council of Atlantic Premiers also launched a process to develop an Atlantic Canada action plan. The plan was to focus on interprovincial co-operation that would strengthen the economic competitiveness of the region, and provide improved quality and more cost-effective delivery of public services to all Atlantic Canadians.

At the invitation of the Council of Atlantic Premiers, Dr. Charles McMillan prepared a report, *Focusing on the Future: The New Atlantic Revolution*, which recommended potential, new regional co-operation initiatives. At the same time, Premiers requested that an internal review process be undertaken to ensure the ongoing relevance of existing co-operation mechanisms. Feedback on the McMillan report was solicited from a broad cross-section of stakeholders across the region. These stakeholders were also asked for any additional ideas and opportunities to build Atlantic co-operation. This action plan represents a synthesis of the ideas identified in the McMillan report and feedback received during the consultation process.

This action plan aims to improve the lives of Atlantic Canadians through joint action on measures to improve the quality and efficiency of government services in health, education and skills development, and to protect the quality of the region's environment. This action plan will help increase our economic competitiveness by reducing barriers to business, building our research and development and energy capabilities, and promoting the region in the global marketplace.

Working Together for Atlantic Canada: An Action Plan for Regional Co-operation represents real, ongoing work taking place across the region. It is about practical efforts in pursuit of genuine objectives to improve the region as a whole.

4. *Ongoing Commitment to Regional Co-operation*

The success of this initiative demands that regional co-operation continue to be a dynamic, evolutionary endeavour. The actions outlined in the following sections are not intended to be a finite list. These actions build upon past and existing initiatives, while leaving the door open to new opportunities for regional co-operation that benefit all Atlantic Canadians.

Atlantic Premiers are committed to an ongoing renewal process for bringing forward new initiatives. This will require commitment on many fronts. Existing partnerships will continue and be strengthened, new partnerships will be forged, and consultation processes with stakeholders will be expanded.

Working Together for Atlantic Canada: An Action Plan for Regional Co-operation is evidence that the four Atlantic provincial governments are dedicated to regional co-operation initiatives, and it demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that the public is fully informed about the collaborative work undertaken by their Premiers.

5. *Efficient and Quality Services to the Citizens of Atlantic Canada*

Regional co-operation is a strong tool to ensure more efficient delivery and higher quality public services to Atlantic Canadians. It will help cut red tape, reduce duplication and overlap in services while maximizing our resources to ensure better value and quality.

The Council of Atlantic Premiers has identified new initiatives in the areas of health, education and skills development, and environment to further enhance efficient and quality services offered the citizens of this region.

5.1 Health

Atlantic Premiers are committed to working collaboratively to ensure that the publicly-funded health care systems of Atlantic Canada are financially sustainable over the long term. With their colleagues across the country, Atlantic Premiers have also taken a lead role in the renewal of Canada's health system and are aggressively advancing interprovincial/territorial initiatives to improve the quality of health care services and for better managing health costs.

Under the direction of the Council of Atlantic Premiers in July 2000, Atlantic health ministers initiated a number of activities designed to improve the overall quality and efficiency of Atlantic Canada's health care system. These initiatives are leading examples of interprovincial co-operation and ensure that all Atlantic Canadians will continue to benefit from quality health services.

For example, successful initiatives are underway in information technology applications in the health field and in organ and tissue donation. Health Infostructure Atlantic (HIA) has been formed to enhance the management of data to better provide information for health services planning across the region. The Atlantic provinces continue to work to improve organ/tissue donation rates in the region by participating in the Canadian Council for Donation and Transplantation. Another excellent example of the regional effort is the housing of all Atlantic organ/tissue donations at the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax.

In addition to these ongoing initiatives, the Atlantic Premiers are also committed to the following new activities:

- Establishment of a unified drug review process for Atlantic Canada. This process will allow for a common evaluation of all new drugs by a Joint Expert Advisory Committee, which will make recommendations regarding approval of new drugs for provincial drug formularies.

- Support for the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre (AHPRC) through a funding grant of \$150,000 per year commencing April 1, 2002. The Centre will be conducting research relevant to Atlantic Canada's health issues, fostering the sharing of knowledge and health policy development, and building capacity in health human resources. The AHPRC is an established leader in health research in Canada.

Atlantic Premiers have also directed their health ministers to explore opportunities for potential future collaboration. The framework and process of development include:

- undertaking an Atlantic-based regional human resource planning project with particular emphasis on health education programming, building on provincial human resource planning initiatives already underway;
- sharing experiences and best practices in acute care sector planning;
- continuing their work under the Atlantic Canada Primary Care Collaboration; and
- pursuing regional health promotion and disease management strategies.

5.2 Education and Skills Development

Atlantic provinces have a long history of co-operation in education. Through the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation and the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, provincial education departments have worked together on issues of mutual concern and benefit. Atlantic Premiers are committed to the continuing work of these agencies.

In an effort to further enhance the level of co-operation within the region on education and skills development, the four Premiers will mandate their ministers responsible for education and higher education to:

- formalize the establishment of the Atlantic Provinces Community College Consortium (APCCC) with the mandate to foster collaboration in providing quality and relevant education at the college level

through such activities as: adopting a framework for regional program collaboration; expanding provincial articulation and transfer credit agreements regionally; signing MOUs on working relationships with other post-secondary education providers; holding a senior college leadership forum; conducting a college-public schools-work transitions study; establishing a distributed learning environment site for faculty professional development; and working with ministers responsible for labour market and other provincial agencies on labour market information and research;

- identify and implement approaches to raise literacy skills of learners of all ages and levels of schooling;
- develop and enhance, made in Atlantic Canada, on-line learning opportunities for students in the region to address the challenges of providing equal opportunity to learn to students in rural and remote communities;
- work together to develop on-line learning programs, products, and tools for export to other jurisdictions; and
- work together to explore an Atlantic approach to several student financial assistance initiatives, including: funding a regional student loan portfolio; establishing a regional student loan portfolio administration centre; and, developing a similar institutional designation policy for student loan eligibility, including an accountability framework.

Atlantic Premiers will also direct their ministers responsible for education and higher education to explore opportunities for potential future collaboration by:

- jointly developing a mechanism for colleges, universities and other education partners, such as the MPHEC, APCCC, and provincial education councils, to work together to build the research capacity within the region;
- jointly developing a mechanism for colleges, universities and other education partners, such as the MPHEC, APCCC, and provincial education councils, to work together to develop a strategy to relate to the infrastructure and maintenance requirements of colleges and universities;

- responding to the challenge of ensuring that Atlantic Canadians have the necessary skills to successfully compete in the labour market;
- working with education partners to identify opportunities to better address the needs of learners with exceptionalities/special needs;
- working with education partners to develop an Atlantic strategy for teacher training to ensure teachers have the appropriate skills to address the needs of students with exceptionalities/special needs; and
- exploring the feasibility of a regional textbook purchasing and distribution system.

5.3 Environment

Atlantic Premiers are committed to taking collective action where possible to protect and enhance the quality of the region's environment.

The path forward for regional co-operation on climate change has been established under the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers' Action Plan on Climate Change. The far-reaching plan was approved by the Governors and Premiers at their annual conference held in August 2001. Each Atlantic province has representatives on the steering committee for this plan that will seek enhanced regional co-operation in such areas as:

- greenhouse gas emission inventorying;
- public sector measures to reduce emissions;
- conservation and energy efficiency measures;
- adaptation to impacts of climate change; and
- promotion of public awareness.

Further, Atlantic Premiers will continue to work together in the national climate change process in Canada, including the related national implementation strategy. The Premiers will communicate clearly and effectively, the interests of the region to the federal government, to ensure the development of a truly national position on the Kyoto Protocol in 2002.

The four Premiers are also committed to ongoing regional environmental protection and management activities in such areas as:

- use of risk-based corrective action for the evaluation of petroleum contaminated sites in the region; and
- development and updating of integrated pest management educational materials to be facilitated by the establishment of a Pesticide Education Working Group with representatives from each of the Atlantic provinces.

6. *Increased Economic Competitiveness: Reducing Barriers to Business*

Increasing the economic competitiveness of Atlantic Canada is essential to create and maintain jobs. Reducing barriers to business in the region is a strategic way to meet this objective. Past accomplishments in this area include: an historic agreement to reduce interprovincial trade barriers and an agreement to harmonize trucking regulations within the region.

The Council of Atlantic Premiers has identified the following three new areas to further harmonize regulations, policies and procedures to reduce unnecessary duplication and red tape.

6.1 Harmonized Trucking Strategy

The development and implementation of a harmonized trucking strategy for the Atlantic region will facilitate the efficient movement of goods to and from the Atlantic region. The strategy will: contribute to increased trade corridor efficiency; improve the capability of regional and local transportation systems; improve coordination among provincial agencies; and facilitate the application of information technologies to the Atlantic transportation system to ensure the evolution of an “intelligent” Atlantic trade corridor.

The strategy will address the following:

- harmonization of rules governing the movement of oversize/overweight loads;

- use of information technology systems for applying and issuing electronic oversize/overweight load permits, licensing, international registration plan, fuel permits;
- electronic clearance at highway weight scales for compliant carriers;
- on-line access to information regarding trucking regulations, routing, weight restrictions; and
- on-line regional permitting initiatives and one-stop shopping for truckers.

6.2 Atlantic E-Government Committee

Given the rate and significance of technological advancements in government service delivery approaches, Premiers will establish an Atlantic E-Government Committee to develop and coordinate efforts in the region that contribute to the effective on-line delivery of government services to the citizens and businesses of Atlantic Canada.

The new committee will be responsible for the promotion of excellence in on-line service delivery in the region as well as identifying new opportunities for coordinated on-line government service delivery.

The committee will be specifically mandated to:

- bring forward recommendations regarding the establishment of an electronic Atlantic business registry; and
- bring forward recommendations regarding an Atlantic personal property registry.

6.3 Government Procurement

Co-operation in government procurement is an important step in strengthening the economic competitiveness of Atlantic Canada. Open and harmonized government procurement policies enable Atlantic-based firms to enhance their viability and competitiveness by capitalizing on procurement opportunities throughout the region and allowing them to further establish themselves in the national and international marketplace.

Building on the strong foundation for regional co-operation in government procurement established under the *Atlantic Procurement Agreement* in 1992,

Premiers are committed to further harmonization of the procurement process in the Atlantic region.

Premiers will mandate the Atlantic Procurement Coordinating Committee to:

- examine opportunities to further harmonize procurement policies, terms and conditions, approaches to tender advertising and distribution, and commodity and exception coding;
- develop an umbrella electronic entry point to provincial procurement on-line tendering systems;
- bring forward recommendations regarding the development of an electronic Atlantic vendor registry; and
- continue to explore options for joint procurement.

7. *Increased Economic Competitiveness: Building Capacity*

The four Premiers are committed to ensuring the long-term economic competitiveness of the region and its business community, nationally and internationally, by jointly supporting efforts designed to build the region's capacity in two significant areas: research and innovation and the energy sector.

7.1 Research and Innovation

Research and innovation is a key driving force in the growth of the global knowledge industry. It is a fundamental building block of improved productivity and standard of living. Today's globalized economy places a premium on those economies that research and innovate.

Atlantic Canada's research and innovation capacity has traditionally been mostly concentrated in its public institutions: universities, federal research laboratories and provincial research institutions. Although the level of research and innovation is considered low by national standards, a growing number of successful spin-off business opportunities have started to emerge in the region, for example, in the areas of information technology, life sciences and marine sciences. The Premiers are committed to further building on these emerging

clusters of economic activity while at the same time ensuring that more traditional economic activities benefit from the new technologies of the 21st century.

Unfortunately, Statistics Canada shows that Atlantic Canada's share of national expenditures in R&D has dropped over time from 5.25% to less than 3.9%. Building the region's R&D and innovation capacity is therefore central to ensuring the region benefits from this focus. The recently-established Atlantic Innovation Fund by ACOA is one example of an attempt to enhance the research and innovation capacity within the Atlantic region.

Given their commitment to build for the future, the four Atlantic Premiers will mandate their ministers responsible for higher education and for research and innovation to:

- work with universities, community colleges, and the private sector to ensure a strategic, integrated and focused approach to building research and innovation capacity within Atlantic Canada;
- increase the Atlantic share of national research and innovation funds; and
- forge partnerships with the federal government to foster a climate of innovation within the Atlantic region.

7.2 Energy

Atlantic Canada's energy sector is increasingly important to all Atlantic Canadians. The four Atlantic Premiers recognize that capitalizing on the full benefits of the region's energy strengths requires an integrated approach across the region. Regional co-operation will ensure that the four provinces maximize the benefits of the region's energy assets while at the same time better positioning the four provinces to respond to national and international forces.

The Northeast International Committee on Energy (NICE), established under the Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers (NEG-ECP), is one such mechanism through which energy issues are considered in the international context. The four provinces are actively engaged in this forum and the four Premiers are committed to furthering this relationship. As an example, in May 2002, an NEG-ECP sponsored Energy Forum will be held in Saint John, New Brunswick.

In order to further strengthen the level of co-operation throughout the Atlantic region, the Premiers will direct their ministers responsible for energy to establish an Atlantic Ministers' Forum on Energy. The mandate of this Forum will be to work together on a regional basis in:

- promoting exploration for, and development of, indigenous resources, and ensuring security of supply;
- providing reliable, affordable and competitive energy sources for the people and businesses of the region;
- promoting safety and environmental protection;
- sharing best practices in energy efficiency;
- encouraging the development of new forms of energy;
- promoting utilization of renewable sources of energy;
- enhancing business development; and
- advancing infrastructure planning for interjurisdictional exchange of energy.

The new Atlantic Ministers' Forum on Energy will be asked to identify where the four provinces should focus their collective efforts to ensure that the energy sector in Atlantic Canada continues to grow into the future to the benefit of all Atlantic Canadians.

8. *Tracking Our Success*

The items outlined in *Working Together for Atlantic Canada* are intended to be action-oriented with completion dates by the end of 2003. This action plan is intended to be dynamic and will continue to evolve as all four governments work with their stakeholders to identify and explore new ideas and opportunities for regional co-operation.

Premiers are committed to reporting to Atlantic Canadians regularly through the Council of Atlantic Premiers on the status of co-operation initiatives along with any new areas to be explored in future years. Each year, the status of these regional co-operation efforts will be reflected in the Annual Report of the Council of Atlantic Premiers.