

## 15.0 Diverse Public Values and Common Vision: Yukon 2000 Revisited - Tony Penikett

TONY PENIKETT: Thank you, Lindsay. I don't do many speeches any more. So, no matter how hot the room gets, if people start to leave, I will ask them to close the doors. I also want to say that there's nothing guaranteed to make you feel old more than being asked to come back to your home town and talk about something you did 20 years ago. But I welcome the opportunity and thank you for that.

The Yukon 2000 process, some people argue, produced Canada's first sustainable development strategy. Like the Yukon land claims settlement, it was the parent of the Yukon Territory's Development Assessment Process. If the treaty was the father of DAP, Yukon 2000 was, in a sense, the mother. Yukon 2000 was a process that gave birth both to the Yukon economic strategy and to the conservation strategy. Together, these two strategies reflect many of the values contained in the 1986 Brundtland Commission's "Our Common Future." But the Yukon's strategy was not a copy of the United Nations' exercise; rather, remarkably, it emerged from a purely local economic planning project.

Yukon 2000 was an invention of necessity. When the New Democratic Party came to power in 1985, all the major mines in the Territory were shut, the economy was stalled, several thousand jobs had been lost; and, as well, aboriginal land claims had collapsed not long before. And I think that the community was, in a sense, divided both socially and politically.

As you all know, the Yukon has a notoriously weak, leaky, even colonial economy, with mining, tourism and government contributing most of the jobs for the Territory's population. That's the history.

To address the economic crisis and the attendant social malaise, the new government knew it needed to somehow involve the whole community in responding to the challenge; but beyond that realization, the cabinet began with very few preconceptions. Everyone accepted that planning a coordinated response made sense. But we had not even begun to think through the basic question as to who should do the planning. Now, planning in this Territory had always been done by someone else: by Federal bureaucrats in Ottawa or mining company executives in Toronto or New York.

But, as you all know, to govern is to choose; and given a choice between repeating that history of being on the receiving end of planning or the other option of doing it yourselves, the answer eventually became obvious. As politicians of the democratic left, who had come of age in the '60's, the new ministers saw that we had a choice between the old fashioned kind of top-down planning and the bottom-up kind, of which at the time, there were few, if any, examples.

Now, back in the '30's, my party's founders, naïvely perhaps, talked about planning the national economy with a committee of three economists, two sociologists, and a statistician. Now, although we in the Yukon might easily have assembled such a committee, my colleagues quickly realized that such a group could not carry out a project like this. With no university handy and precious few resident experts, we decided instead to make a virtue of necessity and rely on the common sense of the Yukon public. Some of our advisors feared that democratic planning might prove to be a

contradiction in terms; but once our government resolved to mind the popular wisdom, we never had a second thought about the correctness of this decision.

The process itself we called "Yukon 2000". It worked towards a broad consensus through a series of public conferences, dozens of workshops involving players in each of our key economic sectors, many, many community meetings, each fuelled with background papers supplied by consultants and public servants. The Yukon 2000 consultation continued for more than two years.

The resulting reports included the Yukon Economic Strategy, the centrepiece of our commitment to sustainability, and a complimentary public process that rendered the Yukon Conservation Strategy, which led in turn to the *Yukon Environment Act*. But, that was not all. The Yukon 2000 process and the commitments contained in the Economic and Conservation Strategies influenced several other policy initiatives such as the new *Education Act* that fostered community schools and a *Health Act* that recognized traditional healing, promoted preventative medicine, and sought to integrate environmental, social, and health planning.

The Yukon 2000 process and the land claims negotiations with the Territory's 14 First Nations ran on parallel tracks for two years and influenced each other immeasurably. Several provisions in the land claims agreements enshrined sustainable development values. The Wild Life Management Accords, for example, established conservation and co-management between aboriginal and public governments as the first principles of fish and game administration in the Yukon. As mentioned, the development assessment process was born, both of the Yukon 2000 discussions and the land claims agreements.

Now, the government of the day hoped that DAP would ensure that people in affected settlements had a voice in future development decisions. And, as I mentioned, in an almost forgotten provision of the land claims settlement, the legislation itself guarantees aboriginal citizens one-quarter in the conference seats of the mandatory annual reviews of the Yukon Economic and Conservation Strategies.

Now, going back to the process in 1985 and '86, I remember that at the Faro Conference, the first of the major conferences in the Yukon 2000 process, participants came together and after much discussion, articulated four broad goals for the Economic Strategy. They were: one, the option to stay in the Territory; two, more local control of our future; three, maintaining our quality of life and natural environment; and four, greater social equality.

Many months later, after hundreds more meetings and the publication of dozens of interim reports, these goals had been translated into fairly coherent economic, conservation and political strategies, largely focused in the economic sector on diversification.

When Gro Harlem Bruntland's Report appeared from the United Nations, Yukoners recognized that much of our thinking meshed perfectly with the ideas of sustainable development articulated in our common future. That our isolated little community anticipated Bruntland in such interesting ways showed, perhaps, how small the world had become.

The political dimensions of the Yukon 2000 process deserve some comment. From the beginning, our cabinet agreed to deal only with issues in our domain and not to waste much energy fretting about matters beyond our control, like world metal prices and international trade negotiations. Jim McNeil, the secretary of the Bruntland Commission, once famously said, “that in developing a strategy of sustainability, the process is in a sense the product.” That’s true. It’s also true that the question of who participates hugely influences the outcome.

Previous economic consultations in our experience involved only business interests, the government, and sometimes organized labour. Had we limited our consultation to the traditional partners, the result would likely have been a fairly conventional economic program. The seriousness of our situation at the time demanded that we reach out a little more. Now, at the time, half of my party’s caucus were aboriginal people.

Our government also enjoyed some support from women’s groups and the environmental movement. So, naturally, we insisted that First Nations, women’s organizations, the environmental organizations had to be represented from the start. And after some hesitation, I admit frankly, we decided to invite participation from opposition politicians. As the process went on, municipal, youth and elders’ organizations also demanded inclusion.

As a result of this broad-based participation, some conventional definitions of economics got turned on their head. The minute we tried to fence in the discussion to purely economic considerations, women participants in particular knocked down the posts. When organizers suggested, for example, that childcare should be considered a matter of social, not economic, policy, women argued the opposite point of view. When facilitators asked if the meetings could postpone the topic of training to some future consultation, participants responded that as a critical economic issue, it ought to be discussed immediately. What about health or the environment? The economic side of these questions had to be surveyed as well.

As university-educated young politicians, we tended to believe that good policy came from good research; but we found that economic indicators used in our background papers sometimes confused, rather than enlightened people. The Yukon Government has an excellent statistics branch, and its officials worked hard to display economic data on large coloured charts and graphs around the Yukon 2000 meeting rooms. However, we soon discovered that their value was largely decorative. Community participants quickly pointed out that the displays on the wall simply didn’t describe economic realities as ordinary people experienced them. For example, the statisticians’ description of discrete economic sectors, such as forestry and manufacturing made no sense either to the logger or the sawyer.

For the statistician, logging was forestry, saw-milling was manufacturing. For the residents of Watson Lake, they both seemed part of one and the same sector. As they studied the pie charts and bar graphs on the walls, conference delegates began to complain about other things the statistical picture missed. Aboriginal participants pointed out that the charts placed no value on the subsistence economy, a major part of the lives of many rural families. Nor was there any accounting of other things the community valued, such as clean air, sports fishing, the work of volunteers or women in the home.

Only later when Marilyn Waring published "*If Women Counted*" did we begin to understand the statistical gap. And later we invited Waring to visit the Territory and to meet with our statisticians; and as I'm sure you all know, Canada has since developed a set of supplemental statistical accounts to take account of some of these things.

The more we talked through the Yukon 2000 process, the more we realized the need to incorporate traditional knowledge about matters such as wildlife and habitat protection. We had to listen to both the professional biologists and the aboriginal elders. Agreement on this point marked an important point of maturation for our discussions. I think that this is commonplace now, but it was not so 20 years ago.

The external cacophony of day-to-day politics sometimes intruded into the process. Because Yukon 2000 represented a break from government as usual, we had to learn to separate the legislative brawls, the kind of antics of question period and so forth, from the consensus-building exercise that we hoped this consultation would become; and having decided to proceed on the basis of agreement rather than disagreement, we set aside issues around which public debate had already become polarized. If any issue became too controversial in the Yukon 2000 discussions, we tended to banish it back to the legislature.

So, the focus on agreement, rather than disagreement, proved to be a radical innovation. The negativity of traditional politics, the stuff of headlines and parliamentary questions, had so numbed many citizens here that they had forgotten any alternative. However, as the Yukon 2000 process proceeded, more and more people, it seemed to me, became attracted to the idea of just sitting and talking with others about common concerns. In a Territory where the aboriginal tradition of consensus politics lives on, this constructive and sensible form of communication seemed quite natural and refreshing. Indeed, after a while, the verbal violence of parliamentary debate seemed to be a perversion to some, rather than the norm.

As much as anybody, the press at first found it hard to adjust to this kind of discussion. At our first big meeting, participants achieved a very high degree of consensus on some broad points. Everyone, whether they were from the trade unions or the women's groups, the aboriginal community, or Chambers of Commerce, subscribed to a great extent to our over-arching goals. But two dissenters from one group grabbed all the headlines out of that discussion.

The media's rule is everywhere, then and now, "No conflict, no story!" That changed as time passed, but the press and the citizen participants in the process both had to learn how to work with each other. The media eventually gained access to all the meetings on the condition that they could quote anyone but not identify them without permission. Subsequently, local newspapers here provided thoughtful coverage of the process.

In many ways that we had never quite intended, the Yukon 2000 exercise became a useful meeting ground for the various opinion leaders in our community. It also helped de-colonize many relationships. In the '70's, groups in the Northern Territories often seemed to deal with conflicts by dispatching them for resolution to our Great White Father in Ottawa, the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs. Home-grown conflict resolution was rediscovered in the Canadian North over the

last generation, largely, I think, as a result of land claims negotiations and federal program devolution, but also because of consultations like Yukon 2000.

Along the way in the process, Yukoners even discovered some surprising things about ourselves. For example, in a few communities, people from the municipal council had never ever talked in depth with councillors from the neighbouring First Nation. In mining towns, management and labour had often not met except to bargain for wages or to settle a strike. Parts of the community met, it seemed, only in times of conflict or crisis. They had few opportunities to discuss common goals or shared values. From this perspective, Yukon 2000 also became, I think, a tool for community development.

Because government has since the Goldrush played a major role in the Yukon economy, our cabinet's role in the Yukon 2000 process eventually, naturally perhaps, became a subject for some criticism. So, having completed the first step and published the Yukon Economic Strategy, when the consultations around the Conservation Strategy were due, we delegated the task to an independent public body, representing a variety of stakeholders, and that process worked far better than we expected.

The roundtable, that practice, that metaphor that symbolizes the Brundtland approach to resolving disputes between developers and environmentalists, is now commonplace. It is an idea known around the world. Our roundtable, the first Council on the Economy and the Environment, which was established after this process completed, included very disparate points of view. But it did a superb job of achieving consensus on a number of difficult issues.

By law, our government had tried to ensure that in future a range of democratic representative entities would nominate the members so that in future the council would always include a balance of interests. We feared that with the alternative traditional patronage appointments, the body might operate simply as an echo chamber for the government of the day.

The sustainability of the roundtable idea itself necessarily involves the sharing of power by all the players, not just industry and labour, but also government officials, as well as the elected people. And let us admit, for politicians there are great risks in this. There are risks for everybody with clout, but in my view, they can be worth it. In the late '80's, I think we thought that roundtables might yet contribute to a restoration of a faith in the system which too many people had felt completely powerless. I think that hope is not so strong now, but we felt it very definitely then.

Any government anywhere contemplating a consensus-building exercise or democratic approach to sustainable economics should approach the work with an open mind. Our government learned an enormous amount from the Yukon 2000 process, from the people in the community; and we constantly had to adjust our plans, even our view of the world, as the consultation proceeded. As social democrats, we had always officially been committed to the goal, the idea of full employment. However, Yukoners taught us that if full employment meant 9:00-to-5:00 industrial jobs for the rest of their lives, they didn't want that. What they wanted instead was an opportunity to be fully employed. That might mean working part of the year in a subsistence economy, a few months in construction or a part-time job, or perhaps with some time off from a full-time job for child rearing, crafts, cross-country skiing, fishing, hiking or a very significant hobby.

As social democrats we had always had preconceived ideas about the mixed economy, about the desirability of it. But Yukon 2000 taught us that what our community valued was a mix of economies, not just a coupling of the public and private sectors, but rather a mixture of mining and tourism and government, Territorial and First Nation, living side by side with a subsistence economy, home-based occupations, the volunteer sector and emerging renewable resource-based industries.

Of the hundreds of recommendations for diversification contained in the Yukon Strategy, many had been implemented by the time we left office. And yet, of course, the decades old problems of resource dependencies, booms and busts, remain with rural and remote areas here and in other similar areas across the Canadian landscape. And any hope that we might have had that the Yukon 2000 process might have permanently changed the economic arrangements of the Territory did not, of course, survive a change in government.

With the Yukon 2000 planning process and the sustainable economy and conservation strategies, we tried to show that government could listen and could learn from its citizens. The trick of course, is to keep doing it, to continue the dialogue; and that's a lesson in sustainability few politicians ever learn.

Regardless, I think it is extraordinarily important to note that not just the Yukon but the Canadian north generally, has been a leader in promoting sustainability. The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, the Gwich'in, Sahtu, Nunavut and Yukon settlements, land claim settlements, are each, in their own way, quite distinctive. However, all these recent treaties have one thing in common: That is an implicit or explicit commitment to sustainable development.

The Brundtland Report, which first articulated the concept has obviously influenced Canadian public opinion. Sustainable development or sustainability or the balancing of environmental and economic considerations has become an extremely popular idea. But it is worth noting that the only place or the one place that these principles have found expression in the Canadian Constitution, much less Canadian Law, is in the land claims treaties worked out over the last few decades with northern aboriginal groups, such as Yukon First Nations.

Now, I remain a fan of roundtable processes, but there are problems of inequalities of power and disequilibriums in the process that we have to wrestle with. Of course, in the most famous roundtable of all, King Arthur's, there was only one vote, one decision-maker, and that was the king. Nonetheless, I learned a lot from the Yukon 2000 process, and occasionally, I've had the opportunity to reflect on it, as in the last couple of years, I spent some of my time as the Senior Fellow at Simon Fraser University's Centre for Dialogue. And, at the Centre for Dialogue, the mediators who work there have a way of thinking about problems. They always talk about "you always need a process that fits the problem. You cannot have generic processes. You need to design the process for the problem." And from this distance, and with that in mind, the Yukon 2000 process now seems to me like an early exercise in dialogue or active listening, an emerging form of conflict resolution in many parts of the world.

Likewise, the consensus-building processes of Yukon 2000, the refreshing non-partisan exercise of building upon agreement rather than disagreement, I think, was very much inspired by the same kind

of impulse that informed the Citizen's Assembly of British Columbia's recent recommendations for addressing their democratic deficits in electoral form. As Einstein once said, "Very few problems can be solved by the thinking that created them."

Now, since the implementing of the Development Assessment Process, the processes that you are discussing here, has been a struggle for a number of years, I thought that I would close with a confessional story. This is a time for me to accept some blame. Many years ago, after this process was complete, Doug MacArthur, who was then Deputy Minister of Executive Council, and I had flown to Ottawa for an all-night negotiating session to complete the Yukon land claims settlement. At this point, MacArthur was also taking over from Barry Stuart as the leader of Yukon's negotiating team. After an all-night session that finally brought a settlement, the three of us met early in the morning for a debriefing. Now, I had heard, and I was afraid, that without any adult supervision, three lawyers had been left alone in a hotel room to draft the Development Assessment Chapter. My concern was that our cabinet had given absolutely clear drafting instructions on the chapter, one of the rare occasions when that happens. YTG then had a vision of a development assessment process that integrated a wide variety of existing government processes, that was structurally appropriate to the small size of the Yukon community, that guaranteed communities a critical voice in development decisions, but that also ensured expeditious decisions for developers and had the capacity to create technical committees to examine questions of fact or research.

So, mindful of our Cabinet's instructions, I asked Barry Stuart, "How long is the development assessment chapter?"

"Seventeen pages," he said.

"Oh my God," I replied. "I suppose we are going to have some kind of Rube Goldberg machine here."

"Don't worry about it, Minister," Barry said. Now, I should explain: He only calls me Minister when he knew I was mad. "Don't worry about it Minister," he said, "these things never work anyway."

To which statement, Doug MacArthur quickly added, "And what's more, we are now going to lock it into the Constitution."

Now, that is a small reminder that great care needs to be taken with any decision that has long-term implications. What you're embarking on here is a discussion about extremely important work for the future of the Yukon. In a small way, I think the Yukon 2000 process, as I said, was one of the parents of this process. I think that the Yukon 2000 process, for most people in the room, if they ever knew about it, has been largely forgotten. But I think it was a moment, a process, which Yukoners tried to come together to articulate a coordinated vision about how to deal with these great challenges; and of course, everybody that faces every major development in the years to come will also have to achieve the same kind of unity of view if they can.

So, on that point, I'll say thank you. Thank you for the invitation and thank you for listening.