



NATIONAL ROUND TABLE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE ECONOMY  
TABLE RONDE NATIONALE SUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT ET L'ÉCONOMIE

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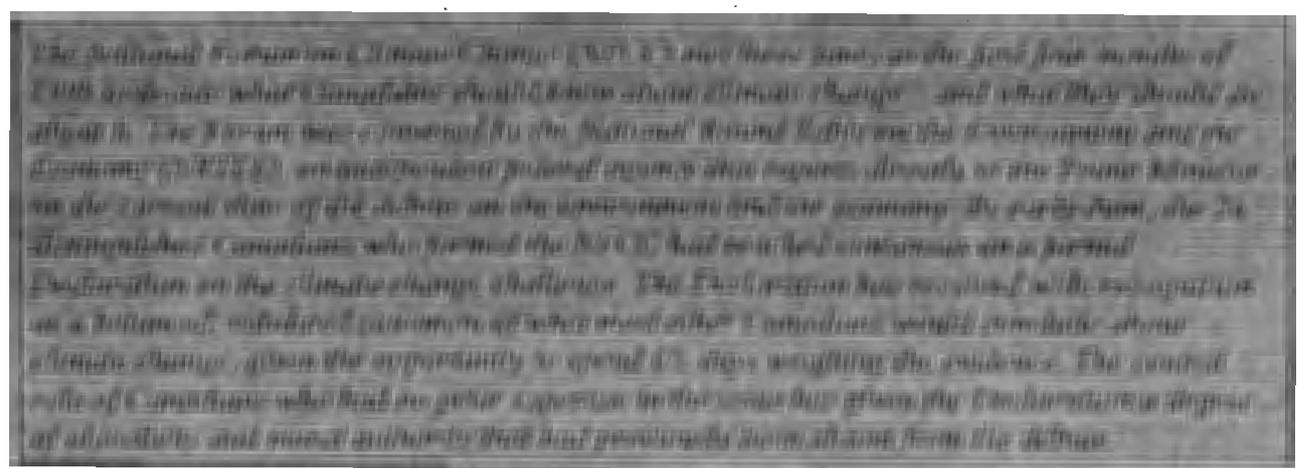
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NFCC Case Study  
SECOND DRAFT • October 28, 1998  
InfoLink Consultants Inc.

NRT-1998090  
InfoLink Consultants Inc.  
Mitchell Beer  
Domestic Emissions Trading

Case Study ## Citizens Confront Scientific Uncertainty: The National Forum on Climate Change  
National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy



**Context**

From a variety of perspectives, climate change is seen as one of the most serious challenges that Canadians will confront in the new millennium. The decisive majority of climate change scientists believe that industrial activity, especially the widespread use of fossil fuels, is causing a gradual warming of the earth's atmosphere. In the majority view, this warming will lead to a wide variety of environmental and economic disruptions, from coastal flooding brought about by rising ocean levels, to an increase in the frequency and severity of weather disasters like the Manitoba and Saguenay floods and the 1998 ice storm. Critics of this view are equally concerned that an over-zealous response to climate change will devastate Canada's economy, by undermining industries and single-industry towns whose prosperity depends on coal, oil and natural gas.

Until the National Forum on Climate Change convened, much of the debate was polarized between two groups that were equally risk averse, each of them advocating the policy response that they perceived to be the least economically damaging. Two months before the NFCC process began, the need for public education and citizen engagement on climate change was underscored by the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, in which industrialized countries undertook to reduce their output of the *greenhouse gases* that have been linked to climate change.

## **Objectives**

### *Phase I: February 16-April 5, 1998*

- To explore all aspects of the climate change challenge, through a series of expert presentations on the scientific, economic, environmental, social, international, and community dimensions of the issue;
- To provide a venue for fair, balanced consideration of conflicting views on climate change;
- To foster interaction and initial exchange of views among Forum members;
- To contribute to the process of building public awareness of the climate change debate post-Kyoto.

### *Phase II: April 6-7, 1998*

- To begin the process of defining a consensus among Forum members on the messages they wished to convey to their fellow citizens;
- To establish the overall focus and content of a Forum Declaration that would help frame the climate change debate for Canadians.

### *Phase III: April 15-June 2, 1998*

- To reach consensus among Forum members on the precise wording of the Declaration.

## **Process**

The National Forum on Climate Change was moderated by Dr. Stuart Smith, Chair of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, and co-chaired by two NRTEE members – Elizabeth May, Executive Director of the Sierra Club of Canada, and Dee Parkinson-Marcoux, President of Gulf Heavy Oil. Of its 26 members, 25 were chosen from a random list of Order of Canada recipients; the other member, representing Canadian youth, had received the Governor General's Meritorious Service Decoration. Forum members had previously been recognized for their outstanding service to Canada in the fields of philanthropy and voluntarism, the arts, sports, education, health care, and science.

From the beginning, Forum organizers were determined that the objectivity and trustworthiness of the panel and the process must be beyond challenge. For this reason, the choice of participants excluded candidates who were known to have strong pro- or anti-environment views. The

random list was also adjusted to ensure adequate representation by region, age, gender, and ethnocultural origin (for representatives of First Nations and Inuit).

This was the first time that Order of Canada members had been invited to take part in a deliberative process around a current public policy issue, and the approach was not uncontroversial in some circles. The original intent was to avoid setting up a forum that relied solely on expert opinion – largely because NFCC organizers saw little or no prospect that specialists on different sides of the climate change debate would be capable of reaching an accommodation of views. A related concern was the need to find a middle ground between a process that might be seen to be elitist, and a citizen-based body that was too grassroots to capture the attention of national media or senior decision-makers.

Initially, some observers and a few members of the National Round Table were concerned that a forum composed of Order of Canada recipients might err too far in the direction of elitism. This discomfort all but evaporated once the process began. As Forum members began to interact with witnesses, and with one another, it became clear that the Round Table had successfully convened a group of dedicated, action-oriented individuals who were deeply engaged with their communities, their professions, and their country. Their initial surprise at being selected for the Forum was matched only by their determination to fulfill their responsibilities as representative proxies for the Canadian population. Their strong commitment and community-based insights clearly validated the option of building a citizens' jury consisting of Order of Canada members.

The Forum met February 16-17, March 9-10, and April 5-7 in Ottawa. Members received honoraria and travel allowances to attend.

The transparency of the hearing process was reinforced by explicit efforts to accommodate members' need for interaction and supplementary information. Opportunities for debate and analysis were built into the Forum's second meeting in March, and an extra half-day of testimony was added to the scheduled meeting in April. This special session was organized to accommodate members' requests for further information in two areas:

- Climate change science and modelling, with particular emphasis on views that ran contrary to the scientific majority;
- Effective community responses to the issue.

In addition to the three regular sessions, many Forum members sought informal opportunities to interact between meetings. At the end of the process, the majority of members expressed strong interest in continuing their engagement with the climate change debate, and many of them have since maintained contact with one another to that end.

Inadvertently, the Forum demonstrated the potential for making deliberative processes more fully accessible to participants with special needs. Anne Burrows, a visually impaired music teacher and author from Edmonton, was accompanied to the three meetings by a personal assistant, and received all background materials in Braille. At the end of the process, she said the Forum had done an excellent job of accommodating her specific requirements. As well, child care funding was provided for Olympic swimmer Michelle Cameron of Calgary, who attended the sessions with her five-month-old daughter. Baby Jacqueline's presence onsite helped underscore the intergenerational implications of the discussion – on the first day of hearings, Environment Minister Christine Stewart observing that a carbon dioxide molecule that entered the atmosphere in 1998 would still be there when Jacqueline became a grandmother.

### 1) Phase I

In 4½ days of hearings over a two-month period, Forum members heard testimony from 29 expert witnesses covering aspects of the climate change debate. To ensure the impartiality and comprehensiveness of the process, a definitive list of possible witnesses was assembled with the assistance of the Canadian Global Change Program of the Royal Society of Canada. The agenda included several panels on specific aspects of the issue, including:

- Impacts of climate change for Canada;
- An international perspective on the Kyoto Protocol;
- Public opinion on climate change;
- Economic costs and opportunities;
- Issues for the Canadian economy;
- Impacts on the Canadian economy and society;
- The media on climate change;
- Approaches to compliance;
- Scientific perspectives on climate change;
- Community action on climate change.

Early in the information-gathering phase of the Forum process, several members expressed concern that they were being bombarded with a large volume of highly technical content, with insufficient opportunity to consider the evidence or discuss it with their peers. In response, two rounds of debate and analysis were added to the agenda for the March session.

As noted above, the half-day session on April 5 was organized after Forum members requested further information on climate change science, and on community responses to the issue. Some members were particularly concerned that they had heard no testimony representing the minority view that dismisses much of the scientific evidence on climate change. Staff at the National Round Table encountered unexpected difficulties identifying a 'contrary' scientist who was available to appear before the Forum on relatively short notice, but ultimately assembled a three-

member panel featuring Dr. Richard Lindzen, Sloan Professor of Meteorology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

## ii) Phase II

Although Phase II of the Forum process began less than 24 hours after Phase I concluded, an explicit effort was made to establish a clear separation between the two stages of work. A professional facilitation team was called in to guide discussion of the Forum Declaration, and the design of the agenda shifted from a presentation format to a series of small-group discussions with reports back to the main group.

In the course of the Phase II session, Forum members agreed that their Declaration to Canadians should include:

- An explanation of the science behind climate change, including language that distinguished climate change from other environmental issues, like ozone depletion;
- An inventory of the expected environmental and economic impacts of climate change;
- A description of the economic impacts that Canada could face if it dramatically reduces its greenhouse gas emissions;
- An explanation of Canada's commitments under the Kyoto Protocol;
- A clear acknowledgement of the scientific uncertainty surrounding the climate change debate;
- An argument in favour of immediate action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, based on the need for a measure of insurance against the possible impacts of climate change, as well as the opportunity for mid-course corrections if scientists' concerns turn out to have been overstated;
- A firm statement that any new government revenues resulting from higher energy costs must be reinvested in new energy technologies, or used to mitigate the impact of climate change control measures on affected communities;
- A detailed review of the steps that can be taken by individuals, communities, governments, and businesses to reduce greenhouse gases.

## iii) Phase III

In the period following the third Forum meeting, considerable negotiation was required to reach consensus on the final wording of the Forum Declaration. The text went through numerous drafts, to ensure that the views of 26 thoughtful, forceful Canadians were reflected in the final document.

The Declaration was released June 2 at a ceremony on Parliament Hill.

## **Challenges**

*Any effort to explain complex scientific and economic issues to non-technical audiences requires time, adequate financial resources, and a commitment to an open, transparent process. During the two months of hearings, many Forum members found it difficult to sift through the mountain of information they were receiving on all aspects of the climate change challenge. Their task might have been impossible if the process had been any shorter, if resource constraints had been permitted to limit the number or diversity of presentations, or if the moderator, co-chairs and National Round Table staff had not constantly emphasized that Forum members had ultimate authority over the content of the final Declaration.*

*Forum members were by no means immune to the alienation and mistrust of government that have been documented in the general population. At the outset, several members of the NFCC were concerned that they had been called together to rubber-stamp a set of policy statements that had been decided in advance. For some, these worries were reinforced by the appearance of two federal Ministers and the Prime Minister at the Forum's opening session, and by the prominence of government scientists among the witnesses. With time and experience, participants developed greater confidence in the process. But their insistence on hearing all sides of the scientific debate was one reflection of their strong commitment to a completely open, transparent discussion.*

*The adversarial style of scientific and academic debate can provoke frustration and mistrust on the part of public audiences. Several participants expressed concern that none of the presenters had seemed willing or able to step beyond their own positions, either to provide an overview of the issue or to acknowledge gaps or limitations in the material they were presenting.*

*Federal departments' interest in the Forum exceeded early expectations. Official Ottawa's attention was more than welcome, but generated one unanticipated challenge: When departmental staff began trying to interpret the process or predict its outcome for their colleagues, considerable effort was required to reassure concerned stakeholders that the overall process would be transparent and fair, and would generate valid results.*

## **Results**

The Forum Declaration was well-received as a balanced, validated statement of what most other Canadians would conclude about climate change, given the opportunity to spend 6½ days weighing the evidence.

In the months ahead, the Declaration will provide a useful platform for building public awareness of the climate change challenge, and for encouraging communities and individuals to become directly engaged with the issue.

## **Lessons Learned**

- ***Citizens can bring a novel, practical perspective to public policy debates.*** Given adequate time and information, Canadians can take ownership of an issue, come to their own conclusions, and provide valuable guidance to policy-makers.
- ***Oversimplification can lead to mistrust.*** Based on the Forum experience, consultative or deliberative processes work best when issues are laid out in all their complexity, so that participants can weigh all the evidence and come to their own conclusions.
- ***Knowledge can lead logically to action.*** When it was first established, the Forum was expected to reach conclusions on what Canadians should *know* about climate change. Forum members themselves decided to extend their focus, to address what Canadians should *do* about the problem. Throughout their work, Forum members demonstrated strong interest in translating complex climatological and economic models into simple, practical steps that Canadians can take to make a difference on climate change.
- ***Canadians support responsible action.*** In the face of scientific uncertainty, Forum members were prepared to endorse a response to climate change that would provide a measure of insurance against possible future impacts.
- ***While citizens may not have the expertise to develop detailed policy prescriptions, they can provide valuable guidance on overall policy directions.*** By the end of the Forum process, participants still felt they had insufficient information to comment on the fine points of federal or provincial policy on climate change. However, they felt fully qualified to suggest priorities and directions that they felt would be acceptable to Canadians.
- ***Citizen juries must find ways of accommodating participants' schedules, while allowing enough time for thoughtful consideration of complex issues.*** NFCC members would have been unable to devote much more effort to their mandate without taking time off from their regular work. In that event, Forum organizers would have had to offer substantial stipends, or rely on participants who could afford to volunteer for a more in-depth process – so that membership in the Forum might have been limited to a much more elite group of wealthy Canadians. This suggests a series of time and resource issues that must be addressed during the initial planning stages of citizen jury process.
- ***To maintain the integrity of a citizen jury, control of the final outcome must rest entirely in participants' hands.*** This may be a particularly difficult lesson for many decision-makers and lobbyists, whose first impulse is to attempt to control any forum that touches on their area of interest.

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