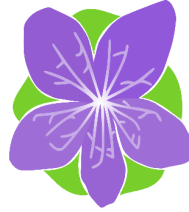


**NEW BRUNSWICK
ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK**



**RÉSEAU ENVIRONNEMENTAL
DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK**

**Updating NB's Climate Action Plan
A Role for Local Environmental Groups and a Strong Environmental Movement**

Presentation to the Standing Committee on Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship

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Bonjour, Hello, Wela'lin!

Land Acknowledgement

Thank you for the invitation to speak to you today. Merci pour l'invitation de vous adresser la parole aujourd'hui. Je vais présenter en anglais, mais je salue nos groupes francophones, et je vous invite à me poser des questions en français lors de la période de question.

Let me begin by recognizing that I speak to you today from the unceded and traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq People. As a provincial organization, the NBEN also conducts its work on the unceded and traditional territories of the Wəlastəkwiyik and Peskotomuhkati, People.

About the NBEN

The New Brunswick Environmental Network (NBEN), established in 1991, is a communication network that links together over 110 non-profit environmental organizations, big and small, french and english, and in all four corners of our beautiful province. The year 2021 marked our 30th anniversary.

The role of the NBEN is to improve communication and co-operation among environmental groups and between these groups, government and other sectors, including academia, business and industry, and our large institutions like health and education. The NBEN is not an advocacy group and does not itself take positions on any issue. Rather, we provide educational opportunities for our members and associate groups, encourage them to speak with a common voice and take unified positions when appropriate, and more generally encourage the growth of

the environmental movement in New Brunswick. We also maintain important online tools like our eco-directory, reference library, and monthly calendar of events.

The NBEN's main mechanisms for delivering on its mission are issue-based caucuses and collaborative efforts:

Caucuses facilitate communications among member groups and can provide relevant and expert input on specific environmental issues of importance to provincial policy-making and broader public education. Currently, the NBEN facilitates active caucuses on watersheds, environmental rights, herbicide spraying, and nuclear energy.

For their part, **collaborative efforts** are an innovative and unique model of collaboration developed by the NBEN over the last decade that provide an opportunity for agencies that share a common goal to advance the development of policy and programming that is relevant, broadly supported, and implemented on a cross-sectoral basis. The NBEN serves as secretariat for four active collaborative efforts on sustainability education, children's environmental health, biodiversity, and climate change adaptation.

I will refer to the work of these caucuses and collaboratives throughout my presentation today.

I have had the pleasure of serving as the Executive Director of the New Brunswick Environmental Network since June of 2020. Since that time I have witnessed the significant contribution of our province's many environmental groups to the social, economic, and environmental well being of their respective communities, notably in taking action to address the climate emergency. Though our many groups may not always be unanimous on the exact path to take to lead us towards a low carbon and climate stable world, I think we would all agree that we are not moving nearly fast enough down any of these paths!

In my former life as a small scale organic farmer, I witnessed first hand how a changing climate was impacting our lives, as my farming projects faced damaging winds, prolonged droughts, heavy rain events or even mid summer hail. No one has a more visceral understanding of how unpredictable our climate has become than our farmers. In this regard, I look forward to presentations from colleagues at the National Farmers Union New Brunswick and the New Brunswick Agriculture Alliance.

Last week and earlier today you heard from a few of our NBEN members and associate groups. I hope you took note of what they had to say. You will hear me echo many of their recommendations here this afternoon. As the province looks to update its Climate Change Action Plan, my job as Director of a provincial network is to amplify the voices of the many small local groups working to effect change in their respective communities and who do not have the privilege of addressing you here today. We will be encouraging many of them to make written submissions. Leaning on the work of our member groups, many in ridings with representatives sitting on this very committee, I will stress the importance of a few key points, which you may view as recommendations:

1. Collaboration with ENGOS, big and small, in pursuing climate action

This is a must. You've heard from a few of NB's larger ENGOS today, but smaller local environmental groups are just as essential to educating citizens about the climate crisis and providing them with opportunities to take meaningful action.

Local environmental groups also act as eyes and ears on the ground. For example, in my own riding of Kent South, the Groupe de développement durable du pays de Cocagne, through the maintenance and monitoring of a network of nesting boxes conducted by its numerous volunteers was able to bring attention to a large die-off of young swallows this past spring. The exact cause of the die-off is unknown, though unusual climatic conditions are suspected. In absence of the local environmental group, this worrisome event may have gone unnoticed.

On this point of collaboration with local environmental groups, I would be remiss if I did not mention the NBEN's active Watershed Caucus, composed of nearly 30 local watershed management groups or water protection groups. Local watershed groups provide very real and essential climate services, through monitoring of ice jams, fish populations, water temperatures, and general water quality, as well as through conducting activities such as shoreline restoration and riparian zone plantings which further protect us from flooding and can serve as carbon sinks.

A 2021 report by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, stated that Community Based Watershed Management is a cost-effective (>3:1) and scientifically rigorous method to collect medium and long-term water quality monitoring data at the watershed scale. In the same report, they also note that a rapidly changing climate across Canada will exacerbate issues of water quality and quantity and will demand an adaptive management approach. Goal 4 of the Province's own Water Strategy identifies the need to work cooperatively with local actors on water protection and management.

Similarly, New Brunswick's many local naturalists groups can help monitor wildlife populations through various citizen science initiatives, thus increasing the information available on the impacts of climate change on NB's biodiversity by establishing baselines for species of interest.

I encourage you to better get to know the watershed groups and naturalists clubs in your ridings, if you don't already. They do good work and can be useful allies in advancing priorities as set by the government.

2. Continued and increased funding for climate work undertaken by ENGOS

Environmental groups do a lot with little. Access to funding through the Environmental Trust Fund and the Wildlife Trust Fund is essential. Provincial funding often serves as

leverage for other levels of funding. An updated Climate Change Action Plan must recognize the value in investing in this work and must not only maintain, but should look to increase existing funding pools to allow groups to do even more. Multi-year funding should be considered, as it allows groups to plan for longer term results. The current public health crisis has shown that resources can be found when the government recognizes the urgency of a situation and acts accordingly. The climate crisis is no less an emergency than the COVID 19 pandemic, and in fact has serious public health implications, which is why the NBEN has groups like the New Brunswick Lung Association and the NB Chapter of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment as its members!

Funding is key. Many communities now have climate change adaptation plans, often developed with support of local ENGOs, but what good are these plans if there are no resources available, both financial and human, to implement them?

Allocation of funds from the Climate Change Fund must be more transparent and should be spent on new climate initiatives, not kept in general government coffers, nor used to pay for existing government responsibilities (for ex: road maintenance or culvert replacements). New revenue from a growing carbon price should be directed to new investments in mitigation to secure things we know work, like deep retrofits, transformation of public transit/transportation, as well as investments in expensive adaptation measures such as protecting or relocating key pieces of infrastructure (sewage lagoon, dykes, etc). To further increase the fund's transparency and accountability, an open application stream should also be created.

3. Increased transparency and availability of climate related data and information to help assess risk and improve decision-making.

The NBEN was pleased to see the recent launch of CLIMAtlantic as the Atlantic Region's new climate services hub and to welcome it as an associate member of the NBEN. I share the view of its Director, Sabine Dietz, that those working on the ground often lack access to the most relevant, accurate and up-to-date information; and when it's accessible, it's often not in easy to understand formats. There is a lack of literacy around the impacts from climate change, the risk, our resiliency and how to increase it, and options for adaptation. Things like the recently released flood maps are a step in the right direction, but we need to know how climate change will impact us in many different areas and the risk this represents.

Our province relies on a small number of industries for a disproportionate amount of our GDP and many of those sectors will be at risk of climate change. We need climate data and information on adaptation for specific sectors. How will our fisheries cope? Our forests? Which agricultural crops will be most impacted? How can we diversify to become more resilient to what lies ahead? Diversification is especially important when considering our food system. The pandemic helped make clear the vulnerabilities of

global food supply chains. Climate change is already causing similar disruptions and this will only worsen. Not only will we find it difficult to import some of the foods we've come to enjoy, but farmers are already finding it difficult to access the inputs they need to do their jobs well. I share the concerns of my colleague Suzanne Fournier at the NFU, who stressed to me the importance of scaled down, localized climate data for farmers, and support for farmer-led initiatives instead of a top down approach.

Here again, watershed groups, naturalists clubs, and food sovereignty, and food security organizations such as NBEN associate group Food for All NB can all help in generating needed data and information.

4. **Clear communication from government to the public on the urgency of the climate crisis (and honesty regarding the solutions available to us in the timeframe we face).**

Earlier, you heard Dr. Louise Comeau from the Conservation Council speak about how public education is essential to mobilizing citizens during the rapid transition to come. Better communications is needed to educate citizens and build stronger mental models, especially relating to solutions and their effectiveness. Our communications and engagement efforts should aim to increase public confidence and build social agency to solve climate change.

Obtaining social license has never been more important and communities must be engaged early and often if we are to get them on board with the kind of transformational societal projects required as part of the transition to a low-carbon future, be it new wind farms, solar arrays, or hydro lines. Community based energy and home energy generation should be prioritized and supported, obstacles to these removed and incentives created.

Throughout the pandemic, we have seen how the public can indeed be mobilized to make sacrifices in the name of the public good when the urgency of the situation is explained to them clearly and with the sense of gravity it requires. Just imagine if the Director of our Climate Change Secretariat were to stand next to the Premier or the Minister of Environment on a regular basis and communicate to the public the seriousness of the climate crisis and what is being asked of them, much like we've seen our chief medical officer, Dr Russel, do these past 2 years?

As mentioned at the outset, the NBEN currently supports several caucuses, including a fairly new Caucus on nuclear energy, specifically Modular Nuclear Reactors. Members of this Caucus believe like you do in the need for urgent implementation of genuine climate action. Through thoughtful consideration and research they have determined that this includes energy efficiency measures, plus rapid electrification of the grid through renewable clean energy sources, but that it should not include new nuclear energy. Funding towards research and development for yet unproven solutions such as MNRs

takes away from the funding needed for more proven, ready-to-go solutions. The cost of energy from MNRs, when and if developed, is currently projected to be much higher than that of renewable power generation. Electricity production from these MNRs will not be available before 2030 at least, and hence too late to help meet carbon emissions reduction targets to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees C. I shared with you the view of the Caucus that nuclear energy is not explicitly part of the current climate action plan and should not figure in an updated version. More generally, we must steer clear of communicating uncertain solutions, such as MNRs, but also things like biomass burning being proposed as a replacement fuel for the Belledune Plant. Stick with what we know works.

That said, communications from government must also include reassurances and plans of a just transition for communities like Belledune that have been disproportionately impacted by industrial activity and the cumulative environmental and health impacts it brings. Workers need to know what comes next and how their skill sets will be redeployed to contribute to a low carbon economy. We salute the work of the NBEN member group Projet Aulnes from the Chaleur region for their work in this regard.

In May 2021, a working group of NBEN members and associates submitted a brief to the minister of local governance as part of the consultations on local governance reform. One of the points raised in this brief was the need for Statements of Provincial Interest. Statements of provincial interest are key in setting minimum standards for sustainable land use planning, watershed management and flood prevention, climate adaptation and mitigation, and protection of ecologically important and sensitive natural areas, so that everyone is operating from the same playbook, regardless of the local governance structure in place where they live. The NBEN was pleased to see SPIs outlined in Minister Allain's White Paper. These SPIs should include strong directives to decision makers and actors for change all the way down the line and include clear climate considerations. SPIs, although welcomed, must not be seen as a substitute for strong environmental laws and regulations and their proper enforcement.

The NBEN has and will continue to support the Government in sharing news of programs and initiatives with a positive impact on our environment and climate. Be direct and honest in your communications, but also remain hopeful, speak to the things people love, use humour, engage artists, and don't be afraid to reach out to new audiences that have less traditionally engaged in climate action.

5. Intersectoral cooperation.

Climate action is no longer the exclusive domain of environmental groups. Most sectors have now accepted the science, have stepped up to the plate and are looking to contribute. As an example, over the past 2 years, the NBEN worked with Green Economy Canada, leading the initial exploration to establish a Green Economy Hub here in New Brunswick. Green Economy New Brunswick, which hosts its official launch on

Thursday, will work with local businesses to accelerate New Brunswick's transition to a low-carbon economy. Within New Brunswick and across Canada, SMEs are the backbone of our economy, employing 9 out of 10 private sector workers and contributing more than half of our GDP. An update of the Climate Change Action Plan should more clearly outline support for SMEs in meeting our shared climate goals. I look forward to hearing presentations from the NB Business Council and the Conseil économique du NB about how the business community can best be supported in taking stronger climate action.

6. **Education and capacity building at all levels to more rapidly implement known climate solutions.**

Through its various collaborative efforts and projects, the NBEN has been working hard to build capacity among key sectors and agents for climate action. I will share two examples.

First, through the **Sustainability Education Alliance**, over 1000 participants strong and growing, the NBEN has helped build capacity amongst educators for integrating climate change teachings into the curriculum. This needs to happen in the classroom, but we need to also invest more in experiential learning programs and outdoor learning programs. Strong climate literacy must be regarded as indispensable an outcome of our public education experience as anything else. Teachers today get this and are thirsting for more resources and support in bringing climate change teachings into the classrooms. I point to the excellent work of NBEN members The Gaia Project and Brilliant Labs in this area, as well as the work of the NBEN's own **Great Minds Think Outside** program which gives educators the skills and resources they need to teach their students outside-whatever the subject matter.

The **NB Climate Change Adaptation Collaborative**, with participation from non profits, academia, and government, and for which the NBEN acts as the secretariat, works to advance and mainstream climate change adaptation across sectors. It has a number of strategic priorities, two of which I will speak to today: mainstreaming adaptation in planning, and the promotion of natural and nature based infrastructure.

As you've heard several of my colleagues say already, our province's natural infrastructure is extremely important in addressing the climate crisis. That role needs to be broadly recognized and acknowledged when considering how we develop our communities moving forward. Natural approaches, such as living shorelines or naturalized stormwater management ponds, but also protected areas such as dunes and wetlands, help reduce risks from climate impacts such as recurring heavy rainfall events or coastal storm surges. Groups in your ridings like Verts Rivage and Valores in the riding of Shippagan-Lameque-Miscou, EOS Eco-Energy in Memramcook-Tantramar, or Vision H2O and the Shediac Bay Watershed Association in Shediac-Beaubassin have all done exemplary work in this area. There should be priority emphasis placed on such

approaches and the co-benefits they bring, including recreation, tourism and human health. New Brunswick is already a leader in this field and will continue to lead with your support.

In partnership with Nature NB, and with the financial support of NRCan and the NB Environmental Trust Fund, the NBEN has been working to build capacity amongst engineers, planners and ENGOs for broader adoption of nature based infrastructure in adapting to the worsening impacts of climate change. Over the next few years, we hope to turn our focus to building capacity amongst municipal stakeholders, local decision makers and municipal staff, filling the gap in knowledge on natural and nature-based infrastructure and providing a structured methodology to identify areas suitable for natural and nature-based infrastructure conservation or implementation based on the value for climate risk mitigation.

7. Meaningfully Engage Youth

The NBEN has always placed a high priority on youth engagement, with two spots reserved for youth on its steering committee, and a youth caucus active at various times during the organization's history. Most recently, in 2021, the NBEN lent its support to a for-youth-by-youth online climate conference titled "In the Red Zone" that recognized how swiftly governments resources can be mobilized and public buy-in can be obtained when the urgency of a situation demands it, and with a call that climate action be kept on the front burner despite ongoing public health challenges. Youth have made sacrifices to protect our most vulnerable throughout the pandemic, we owe it to them to make similar sacrifices to protect their future on this planet.

Rightfully so, young people are increasingly anxious and preoccupied by the worsening impacts of climate change and various other forms of environmental and social devastation. They will be the most impacted by any decisions made today, including decisions to do nothing or not enough. Better engagement of youth in the climate fight should be part of any update to the province's climate action plan. The young leaders you succeed in engaging on climate today are likely the ones who will end up sitting in your chairs tomorrow.

Personally, my own first serious involvement in climate action was back in 2001, when, at age 21, I cycled across Canada from coast to coast as part of the Climate Change Caravan; a group of 40+ mostly youth calling for stronger climate targets than what was at that time being proposed under the Kyoto Protocol and 1997 GHG levels. This cross-country tour was the initiative of concerned students from Sackville's Mount Allison University. Since then, Canada's emissions reduction targets have largely gone unmet and the climate crisis has worsened. I bring this up as an example of how New Brunswick youth have nevertheless continued to push us all to do more and continue to move the needle on what is needed in terms of climate action. Though it may now seem like ages ago, in the Fall of 2019, headlines were dominated not by news of the

pandemic, but news of Greta-inspired youth climate action with large rallies held across the globe including several thousand marching in the NBEN's homebase of Moncton. The Moncton rally was initiated largely by students from the University of Moncton and the NBEN member group Symbiose, as well as several local high schools. NBEN member groups Gaia Project and La Fédération des jeunes francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick have also done great work engaging youth in climate action in this province.

Ideas such as the proposed US Civilian Climate Corps should be explored for New Brunswick as a complement or in addition to existing programs funded through PETL such as the NB Student Employment Experience Development or SEED. Youth voices should be included on key advisory bodies such as the awaited Climate Change Advisory Council.

With one of the largest, if not the largest, provincial environmental networks in the country, New Brunswick is a province that punches above its weight when it comes to environmental protection. Our demonstrated ability to work together for the environment is a shared asset not to be underestimated, and perhaps a very maritime trait? I hope you will consider the key role that local environmental groups play in climate action as you go about updating the plan. With its 118 actions, the current plan may seem far reaching, but so is the climate crisis. With renewed effort and resources, we can move many of the action items currently listed as "in progress" to complete.

Thank you. Merci. Wela'lin.