



National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)  
Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)  
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## BRIEFING NOTE

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**TITLE:** Canada's Environment Agenda and Implications for Aboriginal Peoples.

**ISSUE:** The \$3 billion proposed to advance Canada's environment agenda in the federal government budget 2003 will have implications for the health of all Aboriginal Peoples.

**BACKGROUND:**

**Attachments:** ☒ Yes ☐ No

The environment is a fundamental determinant of health outcomes. This is especially true with respect to the health of Aboriginal Peoples. Environmental issues impact the health of Aboriginal Peoples disproportionately due to an increased reliance on, and contact with, the environment compared to Canadians in general. There also exists a reduced capacity to deal with these effects due to marginalization of Aboriginal Peoples within Canadian society.

The Federal Budget 2003 announced commitments to advance Canada's environmental agenda, with \$3 B invested in key environmental priorities, including:

- \$2 billion over 5 years to support climate science, environmental technology and cost-effective climate measures and partnerships in areas such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transportation and new alternative fuels;
- \$290 million over 2 years to address the critical environment and health issues related to clean air, the management of toxic substances, and the clean-up of federal contaminated sites;
- \$600 million over 5 years to take action to upgrade, maintain and monitor water and wastewater system on First Nations reserves;
- \$107 million over 2 years to implement the *Species at Risk Act* and to create new National Parks and new National Marine Conservation Areas, and to restore the ecological health of existing National Parks;
- \$17.3 million over 3 years to implement our specific World Summit on Sustainable Development commitments such as environment and health linkages, sustainable cities and model forests; and,
- \$3 billion in infrastructure support over the next 10 years. Climate-change related projects will be eligible and given particular consideration.

**IMPLICATION/OPTIONS:**

The Canadian governments' stated expectation is that these resources will enable them to strengthen partnerships with other levels of government, Aboriginal communities and other key stakeholders to

accelerate action and achieve concrete results for Canadians. Implications and opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples include:

**Implications for First Nations (see attached for more detailed information):**

- Issues relating to environmental health, including the safety of drinking water, water and soil contamination and household mold, are of great concern to First Nations communities across Canada.
- The 2002 federal budget allocates \$600 million over 5 years to upgrade, maintain and monitor water and wastewater systems on First Nations reserves. However, in light of the current state of existing water and sewage treatment infrastructure in on-reserve communities, it is not certain that these resources will be enough to fully address community needs, including the needs of those First Nations communities that currently lack basic water and sewage services.
- Household mold in on-reserve First Nations housing is a common problem, and has been linked to respiratory illnesses. According to preliminary results of the 2002 Regional Health Survey, mold was reported in almost one-half of the households that were surveyed. However, the 2003 budget does not allocate any specific funding to deal with this environmental health issue.

**Implications for Inuit (see attached for more detailed information):**

- While the Federal Budget commits to address the “critical environmental and health issues related to clean air, the management of toxic wastes and clean-up of federally contaminated sites”, it does not address renewal of the Northern Contaminants Program, which is of great importance for Inuit health.
- Climate change related research is also highlighted as an area of investment. To build true partnerships with Inuit communities with regard to research, the federal government must commit to building research capacity in Inuit communities. Current analysis highlights the fact that while the Arctic will be one of the regions most affected by climate change, communities in this region have the least capacity to participate in developing responses to this issue.
- Funds identified for the implementation of the Species at Risk Act must take into account that specific dollars need to be allocated for an implementation plan that involves Inuit at the community level, if the legislation is to be relevant for Inuit.
- Three of the seven new parks to be created are in the North. These parks will benefit the Inuit through: protected habitat for species at risk, protected large ecosystems that will enable species to adapt to climate change, newly created jobs in Inuit Regions, and economic spin-off due to increased tourism.
- The federal government has committed \$600 million over five years to take action to upgrade, maintain and monitor water and wastewater system on First Nation reserves. Inuit do not live on reserves and are therefore unable to benefit from this project, despite the fact that water quality is a key concern in many northern communities.

**Implications for Métis Nation (see attached for more detailed information):**

- The Government of Canada’s Budget 2003 offers some potential opportunities to Métis, given the importance of the environment to the health and wellness of Métis in Canada today. The majority of funds identified refer to areas of federal jurisdiction (National Parks, First Nations Reserves, and implementation of legislation). Due to the ongoing issues of jurisdiction and recognition with respect to the Métis these allocations will have little direct affect on the health of Métis.
- Métis organizations, however, have been involved at a number of different levels of discussion and forums regarding the environment. Issues and implications that have been specifically identified by Métis organizations include:

1. Environmental Assessment, Protection and Monitoring

- Recognition of Métis rights and interests as “Aboriginal” Peoples under the Constitution Act 1982
- Traditional knowledge resources including development of a resource strategy and recognition of traditional knowledge and traditional knowledge holders
- Ongoing reporting of environmental, socio-economical impacts
- Recognition and protection of Aboriginal rights and interests
- Meaningful participation of Aboriginal organizations and communities in environmental assessment practices.

2. Capacity Building and Consultation

- Several Métis organizations have been participants in the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. While many of the issues identified therein may potentially impact on Métis, long-term environmental sustainability of non-renewable resources requires an emphasis on Aboriginal community capacity building, including adult education and training, effective consultation with Aboriginal communities, and full participation in decision making in process relating to sustainable development. None of the funds allocated in the 2003 budget appear to be focused in this area.

3. Traditional Knowledge

Funding for the implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development may potentially offer opportunities for funding Métis-specific traditional knowledge initiatives relating to the protection, promotion and use of traditional knowledge by Métis towards the enhancement of health and well being of Métis communities.

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**Approved**

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**Date Signed**

Policy Research Unit \_\_\_\_\_  
And Centre Staff

March 27, 2003

**Prepared by**



## Implications for First Nations

Issues relating to environmental health, including the safety of drinking water, water and soil contamination and household mold, are of great concern to First Nations communities across Canada.

### Water and Sewage

In a 1995 study conducted by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC), almost 25 percent of the on-reserve water treatment facilities surveyed, (211 out of 863), had the potential to negatively affect the health and safety of the community or were in need of repair.<sup>1</sup> According to the results of the 1997 *First Nations and Inuit Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS)*, 22 percent of those surveyed felt that no progress had been made with respect to water and sewage systems on-reserve.<sup>2</sup> In addition, preliminary results of the 2002 *RHS* indicate that approximately 33 percent of those surveyed consider the main water supply unsafe for drinking.

Many First Nations communities, regardless of geographic location, population size and degree of remoteness/isolation remain under “boil water” orders due to inadequate and sometimes non-existent water and sewage systems and infrastructure, and as a result, have a higher incidence of certain water-borne illnesses. For example, a 1999 study by Health Canada indicated that the incidence of shigellosis (an acute bacterial illness of the digestive system that causes diarrhea, fever and nausea), was 26 times higher among on-reserve First Nations than the non-First Nations population. Twenty-three percent of all reported shigellosis cases and 47 percent among children 0-14 years occurred in the on-reserve First Nations population. Researchers have linked the incidence of shigellosis with a number of environmental factors including inadequate sewage disposal methods, contaminated water systems and over-crowded housing.<sup>3</sup>

Authorities, roles and responsibilities relating to the provision of safe drinking water on-reserve are shared between Band Councils, INAC and Health Canada. Under section 81 of the *Indian Act*, Band Councils have the authority to make by-laws in relation to the “*construction and regulation of the use of public wells, cisterns, reservoirs and other water supplies*” and are responsible for ensuring that water facilities are designed, constructed and maintained in accordance with established federal or provincial standards. INAC provides funding to First Nations to assist them in the provision of water services on-reserve, including for capital construction and upgrading and for operation and maintenance, and monitors the design, construction and maintenance of facilities. Health Canada establishes, in collaboration with provinces and territories, the *Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality* and ensures that water quality monitoring and surveillance programs are in place.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “*Drinking Water Safety in Aboriginal Communities in Canada*,” Brief, NAHO, May 21, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *RHS*, 1997, p. 213.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Clark, “*Shigellosis and First Nations Communities*,” FNIHB, Health Canada.

<sup>4</sup> “*Safe Drinking Water on First Nation Reserves: Roles and Responsibilities*,” Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, November 20, 2001.

However, if the proposed First Nations Governance Act (Bill C-7) is enacted by Parliament, Band Council law-making authorities will increase and will include law-making in relation to “*local works, public utilities and waste management*” (including water management). In addition, under the proposed Act, Band Councils will be able to impose fines of up to \$300,000 for contraventions of any provisions of a Band law that is intended to prevent adverse effects on the environment. However, with the increase in Band Council law-making authority, Band Councils would incur broader responsibilities for the management, operation and regulation of water and sewage systems and waste disposal, and in this context, potentially increased liability.

The 2003 federal budget allocates \$600 million over 5 years to upgrade, maintain and monitor water and wastewater systems in First Nations communities. However, in light of the current state of existing water and sewage treatment infrastructure in on-reserve communities, it is not certain that these resources will be enough to fully address current community needs, including, the repair and upgrade of the existing infrastructure, as well as the installation of new facilities in respect of those First Nations households and communities that currently lack basic water and sewage systems. In addition, it is not clear if the \$600,000 million identified in the 2003 federal budget will also be allocated to support the governance needs of First Nations communities should Bill C-7 become law and Band Councils take on added responsibilities in the area of water and sewage management, operation and regulation.

### **Household Mold**

Household mold in on-reserve First Nations housing is a common problem, and has been linked to respiratory illnesses. According to preliminary results of the 2002 *RHS*, mold was reported in almost one-half of the surveyed households. However, the 2003 federal budget does not allocate any specific funding to deal with this environmental health issue.

### **Opportunities for the First Nations Centre**

- The 2002 *RHS*, which is currently underway in 270 First Nations communities across Canada, and includes a sample size of over 28,000, will provide more up-to-date baseline data on the state of water quality and water treatment and sewage in on-reserve communities, as well as information on household mold. This baseline information will provide further opportunities for the First Nations Centre to examine the feasibility of, and undertake work in respect of the following:
  - specific research initiatives in the area of First Nations environmental health;
  - development of ecological variables to enlighten linkages between health status and environmental determinants; and
  - development of a toolkit for First Nations communities in the area of environmental health issues and environmental determinants of health.

Further research will be required in order to identify funding opportunities to conduct the above-mentioned activities, including discussions with Health Canada, as well as in respect of the \$290 million federal allocation, to address the critical environment and health issues related to clear air, the management of toxic substances, and the clean-up of federal contaminated sites.

- The First Nations Centre will work with the NAHO Information Clearinghouse on Aboriginal Health, to address the current situation of highly regionalized data on First Nations environmental health by creating and housing a national database of research and information concerning First Nations environmental health issues.

**Prepared by First Nations Centre**



### **Implications for Inuit**

The Federal Budget 2003, commits \$290 million to address the critical environment and health issues related to clean air, the management of toxic substances and clean-up of federally contaminated sites, but does not address renewal of the NCP, which is of great importance for Inuit health.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) 3<sup>rd</sup> Assessment (2001) confirmed that while the mean global temperature is expected to rise by 3-5° Celsius over the next 50 years, for northern regions the figure is 5-10° Celsius. What this means is that the region with the least capacity to respond to climate change related impacts will most strongly feel those impacts.

The Federal Budget 2003 commits a large sum of money for climate change related research, as well as research into new technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. To build true partnerships with Inuit communities with regard to research, the federal government must commit to building research capacity in Inuit communities.

According to David Anderson, Minister of Environment, "The Partnership Fund that is part of our [Climate Change] Plan will enable funding for new initiatives from Aboriginal and northern communities."<sup>5</sup> The Climate Change Fund is results-oriented, selecting the most cost-effective projects.<sup>6</sup> A part of the committed \$2 billion devoted to climate change over the next five years will further fund this Partnership Fund.

Unless the Partnership Fund has specific dollars to address the tremendous need to build capacity in Inuit communities, Inuit will have difficulty participating. Furthermore, the "most cost-effective projects" are rarely in Inuit communities, as the cost of doing business in the North is much higher than it is in the south.

Budget 2003 also allocates \$33 million for the implementation of the new Species at Risk Act. Inuit have been involved in the development of this legislation from very early on, however, specific dollars need to be allocated for an implementation plan that involves Inuit at the community level, if the legislation is to be relevant for Inuit.

The government has also committed to the creation of 10 new national parks and marine conservation areas. Three of the seven known park locations are in the North: Ukkusiksalik in Nunavut, Torngat Mountains in Labrador and Bathurst Island in Nunavut.

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<sup>5</sup> Anderson, David. from presentation to the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences Workshop, Ottawa, February 20, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Government of Canada Climate Change web site  
[http://www.climatechange.gc.ca/plan\\_for\\_canada/plan/chap\\_2\\_3.html](http://www.climatechange.gc.ca/plan_for_canada/plan/chap_2_3.html)

By establishing new parks, Inuit benefit through:

- protected habitat for species at risk;
- protected large ecosystems that will enable species to adapt to climate change;
- newly created jobs in Inuit Regions;
- economic spin off due to increased tourism.

The federal government has committed \$600 million over five years to take action to upgrade, maintain and monitor water and wastewater system on First Nations reserves. Inuit do not live on reserves and are therefore unable to benefit from this project, despite the fact that water quality is a key concern in many northern communities.

Climate change related projects will be given particular consideration under the infrastructure support portion of the budget. Building foundations are shifting due to the melting permafrost beneath them in Sachs Harbour. Plans are being made to move the community of Tuktoyaktuk due to coastline erosion. The \$3 billion committed by the federal government over the next 10 years will not be sufficient to meet the demand of northern communities, especially since the fund is not northern-specific.

The federal government has allocated \$17.3 million to implement commitments made at the WSSD. One of the key outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was to “aim, by 2020, to use and produce chemicals in ways that do not lead to significant adverse effects on human health and the environment.” It was also agreed to “promote the ratification and implementation of relevant international instruments on chemicals and hazardous waste, including...the Stockholm Convention so that it can enter into force by 2004.”<sup>7</sup> Both of these outcomes will reduce contaminants in the Arctic – an issue that is of great concern for Inuit.

**Prepared by Ajunnqiniq Centre**

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<sup>7</sup> Johannesburg Summit Outcomes, available at <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/>



## Implications for Métis

### Background

“Métis people depend upon a vibrant, healthy environment to ensure a balance is maintained for their economic, social and cultural survival and quality of life. Based upon long acquired knowledge and capacity from being on the land. Métis have a long history of actively participating, monitoring, assessing, and protecting the environment. For Métis people this interaction with the environment continues today.”<sup>i</sup>

According to the 2001 Census, there are 292,310 Métis in Canada. Section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982 recognizes Aboriginal people as Métis, Indian and Inuit.

### Opportunities

The Government of Canada’s Budget 2003 offers some potential opportunities to Métis giving the importance of the environment to the health and wellness of Métis in Canada today.

Some areas where the Budget may have implications that may involve Métis include:

- Environmental Assessment, Protection and Monitoring
- Capacity Building and Consultation
- Traditional Knowledge

Initiatives relating to climate, climate change, the environment and health issues, and environment and health linkages will impact on the health of all Canadians.

#### 1. Environmental Assessment, Protection and Monitoring

The Métis National Council (MNC), established in 1983, is the national representative of the Métis Nation in Canada. Central goals of the MNC relating to the environment and sustainable development include restoration of Métis lands and resources for future generations and recognition of the Métis Nation and its jurisdiction within the Canadian federal system.

The Métis National Council participated in consultations during the development of Environment Canada’s Sustainable Development Strategy 2001-2003. MNC recommendation include:

- Refining and improving the quality of environmental assessments
- On-going meaningful participation of the Métis National Council in environmental assessment processes.

The MNC advocated for the promotion of “sound environmental protection” and “equal balance and accountability of proponents toward the potential environmental impact of their projects on Métis communities’ social, cultural and economic fabric.”<sup>ii</sup>

Métis-specific issues and recommendations included:

- Recognition of Métis rights and interests as “Aboriginal” Peoples under the Constitution Act 1982
- Traditional knowledge resources including development of a resource strategy and recognition of traditional knowledge and traditional knowledge holders
- Project assessment
- Harmonization and “shared stewardship”
- Ongoing reporting of environmental, socio-economical impacts
- Recognition and protection of Aboriginal rights and interests
- Capacity building and adequate financial resources
- Meaningful participation in environmental assessment practices.

## 2. Capacity Building and Consultation

Several Métis organizations were participants in the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy and in the development of the publication “Aboriginal Communities and Non-Renewable Resource Development”<sup>iii</sup>. While many of the issues identified therein may potentially impact on Métis, long-term environmental sustainability of non-renewable resources requires an emphasis on Aboriginal community capacity building, including adult education and training, effective consultation with Aboriginal communities, and full participation in decision making in process relating to sustainable development.<sup>iv</sup>

## 3. Traditional Knowledge

Traditional knowledge is rooted in Métis culture, lifestyle and indigenous views and values. Métis are considered to be dependent upon ecosystem sustainability and the promotion of Métis traditional culture and lifestyle of harvesting, hunting and trapping.<sup>v</sup>

Funding for the implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development may potentially offer opportunities for funding Métis-specific traditional knowledge initiatives relating to the protection, promotion and use of traditional knowledge by Métis towards the enhancement of health and well-being of Métis communities.

**Prepared by Métis Centre**

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<sup>i</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ii</sup> The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA) Five-Year Review Métis National Council Final Report, April 7, 2000. Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency. Website: [www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca](http://www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca)

<sup>iii</sup> Aboriginal Communities and Non-renewable Resource Development. National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. Website: [www.nrtee-trnee.ca](http://www.nrtee-trnee.ca)

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.