

Delegation Report  
ENGO

Sierra Club and the Climate Action Network had two goals for the Second Conference of the Parties: ensure that the IPCC Second Assessment Report is the basis for future action on climate change and advance understanding of the impacts of climate change, particularly in Canada's Arctic.

On both fronts, COP2 can be judged a success.

Canada's scientific representatives, Gordon McBean and David Grimes, worked diligently to advance the Second Scientific Assessment as the basis for "urgent action" during very difficult and protracted discussions in SUBSTA. The failure of SUBSTA to reach agreement on the policy implications of the science fortunately did not prevent Ministers from endorsing the SAR as "currently the most comprehensive and authoritative assessment of the science of climate change, its impacts and response options now available. Ministers believe that the Second Assessment Report should provide a scientific basis for urgently strengthening action at the global, regional and national levels...."

Minister Marchi in his speech to the plenary said: "We accept the scientific view that humanity's influence on the globe's climate system represents a potentially dangerous stress on the global ecosystem, and has detrimental implications for human health."

With respect to impacts, the Environment Minister Sergio Marchi, Ambassador John Fraser, Gordon McBean and David Grimes all advanced the results of the Mackenzie Basin Impact Study. The Minister's speech, despite resistance from the Business community and Natural Resources Canada, acknowledged that "changes in climate are already starting to affect our environment and way of life, particularly in the Canadian Arctic. The area has experienced a warming trend of 1.5 degrees Celsius within the current century, and there is evidence that this has lowered lake levels and thawed permafrost. The study...concludes that there could be radical alterations to the area's ecosystem in the event of a doubling of carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere. The question then becomes: if climate change is capable of fundamentally altering the character of one corner of the world, what could it do to the world as a whole?"

The speech, in the opinion of Sierra Club represents a milestone: this is the first time Canada has acknowledged that climate change is happening in its territory, that climate change is a "potentially dangerous stress" and that a doubling of carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere could lead to "radical alterations" in the Mackenzie ecosystem. These statements take Canada closer than it has ever been to supporting the position that a doubling of carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere is dangerous and must be avoided. Minister Marchi did what he should have done at COP2: he defended the environment.