



COUNCIL OF THE FEDERATION MEETS WITH AUSTRALIAN PREMIERS

MONTREAL, April 12, 2006 –The Council of the Federation met on April 11 and 12 in Montreal, Quebec, in a special joint meeting with Premiers from the Commonwealth of Australia. Premiers exchanged views and perspectives on Canadian and Australian federalism, and discussed issues of mutual concern and priority in Canada and Australia.

Canada and Australia have much in common. They are both original members of the Commonwealth of Nations and share much in history, geography, population and economy. Both have stood shoulder to shoulder in two world wars. Both are countries where immigrants of diverse cultural backgrounds joined the Aboriginal peoples in vast lands with harsh climates, and both countries continue to welcome new immigrants. Both are vibrant participants in the global economy, exporting natural resources, goods and services to the rest of the world. Both understand and adapt to a vast landscape as part of their geographic makeup. Huge distances and a diverse society have made a federal system of government necessary in both countries.

Canada and Australia both operate with federal systems of government, with legislative authority shared between their constitutional orders of government. The Premiers emphasized the importance of federalism to the working of their democratic systems, policy development and the delivery of services within each country.

Australia and Canada as federal countries attempt to foster meaningful relations between governments based on respect for the constitution and recognition of the diversity within their federation. One of the major benefits of a federal system is that there can be diversity and pluralism in public policy and local solutions can be delivered to local problems. States, provinces and territories can play an important leadership role in building a more constructive and cooperative federal system. Premiers agree that promoting increased cooperation and closer ties between States, provincial and territorial governments can strengthen their federations and noted the success and potential of the Canadian Council of the Federation.

Canadian and Australian Premiers shared perspectives on the collaborations, successes, and challenges in the operation of their respective federal systems, and discussed Canadian federal-provincial-territorial relations and Australian federal-state-territorial relations. Canadian Premiers also provided Australian Premiers with a presentation on the history, operation, and priorities of the Council of the Federation, which has fostered greatly improved interprovincial-territorial communication and collaboration in Canada.

Canadian and Australian Premiers noted that there are many similarities between their two countries, although each has its own set of unique intergovernmental issues and priorities. All Premiers agreed that governments would benefit from working together wherever reasonable and desirable to ensure that their citizens are provided programs and services of the best possible quality.

Australian and Canadian Premiers also took time to share perspectives on several key issues facing their jurisdictions. These included the areas of economic development, trade and biotechnological research; transportation infrastructure; and post-secondary education and skills training. These are common priorities critical to both Canada and Australia, since Asia-Pacific countries present the two countries with increased market opportunities and growing international competitive pressures.

Premiers stressed that they should seize the opportunities presented by the Asia-Pacific countries and that improving national transportation systems is key to future competitiveness. Transportation is a foundation of Canada's and Australia's economic engines and is critical to the high quality of services for all Canadians and Australians.

Canadian and Australian Premiers discussed how these priorities are being addressed by their governments, and discussed possible ways in which Canadian provinces and territories and Australian states and territories can, within their respective jurisdictions, collaborate to build highly skilled workforces, invest in strategic transportation infrastructure, and further develop their economies to remain internationally competitive well into the future.

All Canadian and Australian jurisdictions aim to grow prosperity, improve well being, attain sustainability, foster creativity, build communities and expand opportunity. This historic meeting has laid the foundation for collaborative work to move forward on these fronts.

Canadian and Australian Premiers discussed the following actions arising from their joint meeting:

- Canadian Premiers have been invited to reconvene in two years in Adelaide, South Australia, Australia for the second joint meeting between the Canadian Council of the Federation and Australian Premiers.
- Premiers agreed that the focus of this meeting would be to establish closer economic and trade links between provinces, states and territories in the two countries.
- It was noted that BIO 2007 to be held in Boston, Massachusetts provides those Premiers attending an opportunity to follow up on issues arising from this meeting. It was agreed that those Premiers in attendance at BIO 2007 would explore opportunities for joint promotion of Australian and Canadian life sciences industries.
- Premiers agreed to explore bilateral exchanges between Canadian and Australian provincial, state and territory officials to facilitate policy and program information exchange between the two countries, and agreed, where practical, to freely share best practices, policies and programs.

- Premiers agreed to explore the establishment of joint provincial-territorial-state offices in other countries where governments share common interests.
- Premiers suggested that the Canadian and Australian federal governments explore ways to ease the transfer of skilled workers between the two countries and adapt visa requirements accordingly.

Canadian Premiers express their thanks and appreciation to Australian Premiers for their interest in the Council of the Federation, and offer their ongoing support and assistance in providing perspectives on the operation of Canadian intergovernmental relations.

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BACKGROUND: ATTENDEES

CANADA:

Premier Ralph Klein (Chair, Council of the Federation)
Alberta

Premier Jean Charest
Québec

Premier Rodney MacDonald
Nova Scotia

Premier Bernard Lord
New Brunswick

Premier Gary Doer
Manitoba

Premier Gordon Campbell
British Columbia

Premier Pat Binns
Prince Edward Island

Premier Joseph Handley
Northwest Territories

Premier Paul Okalik
Nunavut

Minister Marie Bountrogianni
Ontario

Minister Loyola Sullivan
Newfoundland and Labrador

AUSTRALIA:

Premier Steve Bracks
Victoria

Premier Mike Rann
South Australia

Deputy Premier Anna Bligh
Queensland

Minister Margaret Quirk
Western Australia

Minister John Hargreaves
Australian Capital Territory