

Statement by the Delegation of Canada to the Sixteenth Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

Wednesday, May 7 2008, 10:00 am – Drought Preparedness

Mr/Madame Chairperson,

Canada experienced serious land degradation and severe drought in the 1930s. In response, Canada developed soil and water conservation initiatives and converted fragile lands into grassland to inhibit land degradation. Despite these efforts drought can still cause loss of income and pose adaptation challenges. This was seen in the 2001 - 2002 drought, which affected regions not normally affected by drought such as parts of Eastern Canada and northern areas of Canada's prairies. This drought cost an estimated \$6 billion, in total, to the agriculture, forestry, petroleum and mining, hydro power, and water supply sectors. Climate change experts are anticipating greater variability and shifts in timing of available water supplies in the future, with a predicted increase in the frequency and duration of droughts. Because droughts are expensive, efforts are being applied to deal with drought proactively as a part of a comprehensive Canadian approach.

Canada has established a range of drought identification activities. These activities require partnerships across jurisdictions and sectors. One example of drought monitoring and reporting is 'Drought Watch'. This is a national program that provides timely information about climatic impacts on water supply and agriculture. Drought Watch products combine physical information, such as precipitation and soil moisture, with historic climate information to assess the status of drought in Canada's agricultural regions.

During each growing season, the Climate Production Risk Committee uses Drought Watch maps and regional information supplied by representatives from provinces and other government departments to assess drought impacts on soil conservation, crop and livestock management, and range, pest and water supply management. The information is updated bi-weekly and findings are made public so that people facing a risk from drought are able take the necessary risk management actions.

Canada is developing a national drought strategy. The strategy's purpose is to define Canada's role and contribution to agricultural drought risk management and response in collaboration with provincial partners. The strategic priorities include:

- Working with provinces and other stakeholders on drought,
- Developing effective drought monitoring systems, and
- Improving drought preparedness and responses

Canada is a large country and providing timely drought information at an appropriate economic scale is difficult. Other complementary ways of dealing with drought need to be developed. Drought scenario testing and use of decision support tools that allow producers to initiate

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proactive adaptation options and make informed choices before embarking on a specific farming activity are examples.