No room for cop-outs
In the Prime Minister’s mandate letter to you, a promise is made to Canadians to deliver ‘real results’. What are your immediate and longer term plans for effecting real environmental change?

The Government of Canada is committed to taking action domestically on climate change, putting a price on carbon and reducing emissions. However, we recognise that we cannot tackle climate change alone, which is why we are committed to working with the provinces and territories to establish a pan-Canadian framework that is consistent with the outcome reached at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference (COP21). Federal-provincial engagement is already underway and will continue with a meeting between Prime Minister Trudeau and the provincial and territorial premiers within 90 days of COP21.

We are also committed to supporting our communities and economy by making significant new investments in green infrastructure and clean technologies. Not only will these strategic investments help us tackle climate change, they will also create jobs. Canadian businesses now have an incredible opportunity to be part of the solution and to help build a low-carbon economy.

You are the first Canadian federal minister in years to attend COP21 at the start of negotiations. What was your overall impression and how did you feel when the global deal was reached?

It was a historic day. I was, and am, so proud of the important step that Canada and others at the conference took together. I am very pleased that Canada and 194 other countries were able to reach an ambitious and balanced agreement to fight climate change. Together with our international partners, we agreed to strengthen the global response to limit global average temperature rise to well below 2°C as well as pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C.

Historically, Canada has had a poor reputation for environmental stewardship, backing out of the Kyoto agreement in 2011, for example. Do you think this is a fair assessment of the country?

What I saw at COP21 was that climate change is a priority for many Canadians and we want to help. We want to support our country, and offer our creativity and solutions. Our Government will listen to Canadians and do more to address the global challenge of climate change.

Tackling climate change, reducing carbon footprints, establishing cleaner air: how much of the responsibility for effecting real environmental change lays at the Government’s door?

Tackling climate change will require efforts from government, businesses and individuals. For its part, our Government will provide national leadership and join the provinces and territories in taking action on climate change, put a price on carbon and reduce carbon pollution.

Canadians also have a central role to play in fighting climate change and in making sustainable development a reality. Through information dissemination, policies and incentives, governments can empower citizens to act on climate change and sustainability issues in their personal lives by making them aware of ways to shrink individual ecological footprints, and removing disincentives to implementing these practices. This can include the adoption of alternative forms of transportation, green technologies and renewable clean energy sources by individual Canadians to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, as well as recycling and reusing to reduce resource consumption.

I was very encouraged to see so many Canadians in Paris, and not only those who were part of the Canadian delegation. Premiers from provinces and territories were here, as well as mayors, aboriginal leaders, young people, environmental NGOs, businesses, entrepreneurs and investors. As I mentioned, their message was loud and clear: climate change is a priority for many Canadians.

How positive are you that Canada will meet the demands of the Paris agreement?

I’m confident that together we can tackle it. We have a responsibility to next generations and we are committed to building a lasting international solution to fight climate change. We rose to that challenge in Paris and we will continue doing so.

Proud of the international agreement reached at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference, Canada’s new Minister of Environment and Climate Change, the Honourable Catherine McKenna, reveals the country’s plans for effecting real environmental change.
How much importance does the Canadian Government place on environmental and climate change research?

Canada’s climate change target and actions will be informed by what the science is telling us. For example, Trudeau joined French President François Hollande, US President Barack Obama and Bill Gates to announce the launch of Mission Innovation, an ambitious clean technology initiative that seeks to double government investment over the next five years in clean energy research and development, and to spur business investment in clean technology.

In what way will the Ministry for the Environment and Climate Change be engaging with researchers?

We have already engaged and will continue to engage with climate change researchers. As part of the First Minister’s meeting in November, climate scientists Dr Gregory Flato (Environment and Climate Change Canada) and Mr Alain Bourque (Ouranos) led a briefing on the science of climate science with the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers and premiers. Topics included the climate system, evidence and causes of climate change, and future climate projections. Flato and Bourque are just two examples of the world-class scientific expertise that exists in our country. I recognise the importance of the work done by Canada’s scientists and will continue to look to their expertise, because our actions will be informed by what the science is telling us.

How will you be ensuring that both the Government and the public are informed by robust environmental research?

Effective public participation is a basic principle of responsible government in a parliamentary democracy. Towards this end, our Government will empower Canadians by widely promoting these opportunities to make people aware of how they can participate in and inform government decision-making processes. For example, just last month, I held a TweetChat on the topic of climate change.

Trudeau has placed public participation as a priority by asking us all to continue establishing close collaborations with our colleagues; and to create constructive dialogue with Canadians, civil society and stakeholders, including business, organised labour and the broader public as well as the not-for-profit and charitable sectors.

Furthermore, at our department, scientists and experts will be encouraged to share their research with the public through media opportunities, scientific publications, partnerships and studies.

I recognise the importance of the work done by Canada’s scientists and will continue to look to their expertise, because our actions will be informed by what the science is telling us.

AN HISTORIC CLIMATE AGREEMENT

On December 12, 2015, Catherine McKenna issued a statement to mark the conclusion of the Paris Climate Conference

“Today is a historic day and it gives me great pride that Canada, alongside the countries of the world has reached an ambitious and balanced agreement to fight climate change. I am proud of our team of negotiators, who—on behalf of Canadians—worked tirelessly over the past two weeks.

“Already in Canada, we can see and feel the effects of climate change: we have seen floods in Alberta, wildfires across British Columbia, and Prince Edward Island’s coastline is receding. The Arctic is experiencing serious climatic changes with melting permafrost, impacting the lives of Indigenous peoples.

“We came to Paris recognising that climate change is having a significant impact in Canada and around the world, and we were prepared to address this challenge head-on. We have a responsibility for the next generations and were committed to build a lasting international solution to fight climate change, and we rose to that challenge.

“This agreement is ambitious and balanced. It was adopted by 195 countries—big and small, rich and poor—who will set targets, report on them in a transparent manner and review and improve them every five years. Collectively, the countries of the world agreed to strengthen the global response to limit global average temperature rise to well below 2°C, as well as pursue efforts to limit increase to 1.5°C. We need to do this to avoid the harshest impact of climate change on our geography, livelihoods and health.

“The Prime Minister, my colleagues, and I will now work with the provinces and territories to establish a pan Canadian framework that is consistent with the outcome reached in Paris for combatting climate change.

“We will support our communities and our economy by making significant new investments in green infrastructure and clean technologies. Not only will these strategic investments help us tackle climate change, they will also create jobs. Canadian businesses now have an incredible opportunity to be part of the solution and to help build a low-carbon economy.

“I was very encouraged to see so many Canadians here in Paris, and not only those who were part of the Canadian delegation. Premiers from provinces and territories were here, Mayors from across our country, as well as aboriginal leaders, young people, environmental NGOs, labour, businesses, entrepreneurs and investors. Their message was loud and clear: climate change is a priority and we want to help, we want to support our country, we want to offer our creativity and our solutions.

“It has been very inspiring to me to feel this collective will and solidarity. This is the spirit we now need to bring back home so that we can tackle climate change together. I cannot stress enough how important it is that every Canadian take part in this effort. Climate change is the challenge of our generation. Together we can do this.”