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## HUBBARDS ROUNDTABLE

*Working Together  
for the Future of Our Rural Communities*

### SUMMARY REPORT

Hubbards, Nova Scotia  
September 15, 2005

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# **HUBBARDS ROUNDTABLE**

## ***Working Together for the Future of Our Rural Communities***

**Hubbards, Nova Scotia  
September 15, 2005**

### **1. FOREWORD**

This report is a summary of discussions that took place at the Roundtable held in Hubbards, Nova Scotia on September 15, 2005. No limits were placed on the participants during discussions. Views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Government of Canada or the Government of Nova Scotia.

Since their first meeting in the spring of 2003, ministers responsible for rural affairs in Canada have been striving to work more closely together and to better take into account rural realities when developing policies and delivering programs and services. Consultations with rural citizens to date have highlighted the importance of supporting communities in achieving their visions and in finding ways to better coordinate actions between governments.

Building on past consultations and in anticipation of another ministerial meeting to decide on an approach for closer cooperation, the Hubbards Roundtable was organized and was the second in a series of roundtables being held in different parts of the country.

As governments in Canada continue to explore approaches for closer cooperation, an enhanced understanding of the major challenges and priorities for action will contribute to ongoing joint efforts aimed at improving the viability of rural communities.

### **2. INTRODUCTION**

The Hubbards Roundtable was jointly organized by the Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Nova Scotia Office of Economic Development. The event was co-hosted by the Honourable Wayne Easter, Member of Parliament and Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development, and the Honourable Ernest L. Fage, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia and Minister of Economic Development.

Participants at the Hubbards Roundtable (28 in attendance) included: representatives from provincial, regional, local and youth organizations and associations; community, cooperative and academic leaders; economic development officers; and representatives of the federal, provincial and municipal governments.

The results of the Roundtable will help guide the future actions of the Government of Canada and the Government of Nova Scotia in support of rural communities and will contribute to the ongoing development of the proposed National Rural Framework (NRF). Joint federal,

provincial and territorial work to date on the proposed NRF has identified five areas of focus for collaboration among governments (described in section 3 of this report), which provided the context for the Roundtable discussions.

Under the theme “Working Together for the Future of Our Rural Communities”, participants were invited to share their views on the major challenges to the viability of rural communities, priorities for government collaboration and action, the roles of communities, and the results or outcomes that could be expected from collaborative action. Opinions and suggestions were transmitted to government representatives both verbally and in writing. This report stems from discussions on and responses to the following questions:

1. What are the two or three greatest challenges or risks related to the viability of rural communities?
2. In your opinion, which of the challenges or risks that you have identified should be priorities that the ministers of both orders of government should be working on?
3. What actions should governments take to address the priorities you have identified?
4. As a stakeholder, what role do you think communities should play in the approach you are suggesting ministers take?
5. What results do you expect from governments? For example, what progress should ministers be aiming for after three --- or even five --- years of engagement, with regard to the priorities you recommend?

### **3. THE NATIONAL RURAL FRAMEWORK (NRF)**

The over-arching goal of the proposed NRF, a framework to facilitate federal, provincial and territorial collaboration on rural issues, is to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of rural communities by creating an environment in which communities and citizens have access to improved social and economic opportunities.

Throughout the dialogue, participants covered a number of topics relating to the five NRF focus areas (described below). A summary of the topics discussed are presented in section 4 of this report.

<b>Sustainable Livelihoods</b>	Factors affecting how Canadians can provide for themselves and their families to live in rural communities that are economically and socially healthy.
<b>Environmental Stewardship</b>	Ways in which rural and urban communities can share with governments the responsibility for good management, the benefits of natural resources and a healthy environment.
<b>Innovative Approaches to Rural Infrastructure</b>	Approaches allowing communities, working together with governments, to develop and maintain physical, social and knowledge-based infrastructure that addresses their needs.

<b>Engaged Populations and Institutions</b>	Opportunities for institutions and governments to provide the environment where Canadians can actively participate in making decisions that affect the community.
<b>Demographic Adaptation</b>	Openness to the range of options rural communities may need to consider in order to adapt to ongoing changes in population, economics and services.

## **4. IMPROVING COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY AND VIABILITY**

Rural communities face multiple challenges. International, national, regional and local factors all play a role in their current realities and future potential. Rural challenges are cross-cutting, they do not fall neatly within the mandate of one government department or one level of government. Coordinated approaches are therefore required. As rural communities are very diverse, actions to improve community sustainability should be flexible and sensitive to local circumstances. To meet rural challenges and maximize opportunities, communities and all levels of government should work together.

### **4.1 Challenges and risks related to the viability of rural communities**

As stakeholders active in the development of their communities, participants at the Hubbards Roundtable provided their perspectives on current rural challenges. A number of risks were identified and some common challenges emerged such as: addressing demographic changes; supporting economic development; strengthening rural infrastructure; and building community capacity.

#### **4.1.1 Demographic Changes**

Rural communities are fast becoming “retirement” communities due to the aging population, the lack of sustainable industries, and the out-migration of people (e.g. Acadians, young families, youth) with little immigration as most settle in urban areas. The immigration system needs to be changed and additional resources/incentives should be provided to attract immigrants to rural Nova Scotia.

The out-migration of youth threatens the sustainability of rural communities and weakens the competitive environment. Youth have valuable opinions and represent the future work force (e.g. trades) as the population ages and migrates to urban centres. Youth are not seen as resources that communities have in common. Instead, they are viewed as problems and as people needing services. A shift and attitude change could go a long way to contribute to the long-term sustainability and viability of rural communities.

The main reasons why youth leave rural communities are the lack of local employment and educational opportunities. Taking young people outside of their communities at an early age for

educational purposes breaks their “connectivity” to their communities. Youth also leave for other reasons. These need to be identified and programs developed to meet their needs. Greater community cohesion and planning is required to retain youth.

#### **4.1.2 Economic Development**

Concern was expressed about whether economic development is sufficiently strong in rural communities, where natural resources sectors (e.g. fishing) are weakening. Challenges are faced in attracting entrepreneurs and employment opportunities are limited - employment opportunities keep people in rural areas. Acadians are under-employed and most make less than \$20,000 a year. Governments should assist entrepreneurs in providing equitable salaries to employees. All three levels of government should build a more competitive environment through competitive tax and regulatory regimes.

Accessing capital for business development and economic diversification is a challenge for many rural communities and businesses. However, it was noted that those who have equity and assets can access financial programs (e.g. micro-credit) through credit unions. Program funding should be long-term (e.g. 10 to 20 years) to show the government is committed and to ensure a continuum of certain initiatives.

Political structures make it more difficult to develop community-based businesses. The provision of services and the funding of services require creativity and innovation. The existing taxation system is a burden in terms of rural development. Tax incentives are needed and should be viewed as creating opportunities for rural development.

It was noted that the Black Loyalist Association has done well in using the Business Development Fund - a fund geared towards helping community organizations develop plans - as it received an investment of \$25,000/year. The organization developed a good strategy, received other funding (which was not through the Black Business Initiative or from a government agency) and counts the Governor General as one of its supporter.

Sustainable, long-term fisheries policies are needed as the fisheries sector brings in more revenue in rural Nova Scotia than all other sectors combined. Nova Scotia rural communities, dependant on the fisheries industry (e.g. lobster, crab) which is vulnerable, should plan to diversify their economies as “stocks” are depleting. Many wharves are being abandoned because communities lack capacity and the people do not have the necessary knowledge and training to operate them. Governments should include the word “wharf” in the definition of “infrastructure” to provide communities the needed resources. Underlining the need for economic diversification, one participant asked:

*“What will young people do instead of fishing?”*

Despite the fact that Nova Scotia has one of the strongest agricultural economies in the country due to the substantial support provided by the provincial government to this industry, the overall agricultural industry is on the decline. Therefore, the Government of Canada should play a role in ensuring rural communities stay viable.

Other concerns related to how rural communities would deal with oil and energy shortages and food safety issues. For example, other energy alternatives should be explored due to the high cost of fuel and oil. As noted by one participant, solar panels were made available fifteen years ago through a program. These types of programs would benefit communities.

### **4.1.3 Infrastructure**

There is a lack of infrastructure and of strategic infrastructure planning, including long-term strategic planning in natural and renewable energy sources, in rural communities. The existing infrastructure is deteriorating and difficult to maintain due to limited resources. Inadequate infrastructure, highways and roads, and the lack of or limited access to broadband services, limits access to educational and employment opportunities and health care services. Without good highways and roads, it is difficult for people to move around and for doing business in Cape Breton.

Rural citizens are experiencing challenges in accessing services and programs (e.g. health, literacy) and rural communities in diversifying their economies due to the lack of technological infrastructure and of the knowledge to use the technology. Small businesses want to market internationally but it is difficult for them to do so without the technology. The rural municipality of Hubbards is still facing a challenge in getting access to broadband as are other communities in the area.

Under-education of the population-base is a problem that exists in many rural communities. A significant number of rural citizens do not have a grade 12 education level and thus, are under-employed and lack resources. One participant mentioned that a recent study on the eastern part of service areas revealed that 30% of the population had not completed high school. Increased access to education programs and services (e.g. literacy, numeracy, career guidance, prior learning assessment) is therefore required. Libraries, which are out of date, are not often invited to take part in discussions to address education/literacy issues. Another participant stated that a certain number of people were needed over a very large geographic area to obtain funding to create a literacy program. In this context, per capita funding allocations should be revised.

Rural communities need adequate, long-term health care services close to them in all areas: emergency, first responder, medical and surgical services. Attracting and retaining the appropriate professionals in these areas is a challenge for rural communities. Seniors in rural communities often have to travel or move to urban centres in order to access services and facilities not currently provided in rural areas.

### **4.1.4 Community Capacity Building**

There needs to be a positive attitude and movement by governments towards rural communities, rural development and rural issues. Increased interaction, communication and collaboration are required between all levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal), the different industries, and rural and urban communities. More strategic consultations that engage rural citizens, like the Hubbards dialogue, should be organized and revisited regularly. Rural and urban communities should have the same level of influence and should increase linkages on common issues. Both communities face similar challenges such as the ability to: retain youth, attract entrepreneurs, obtain resources and compete in international markets.

Government departments should get closer to the rural realities “on the ground” to know what rural communities need, take into consideration the issues and challenges they are facing, and align their program criteria accordingly. The closing of government offices and loss of government services in Acadian communities has created a disconnect between the government and those communities. As one participant noted:

*“Everything is in ‘crisis’ or ‘decline’.  
Policy-makers and funders need to get closer to the ‘treasures’.”*

Rural communities need capacities to ensure they remain healthy and sustainable. Community organizations and leaders often lack expertise, tools and resources. The voluntary sector is experiencing a decline; volunteers should therefore be supported to increase the volunteer base. One participant noted that the economic value of the voluntary base in Nova Scotia was in the millions. People from rural communities often work in silos and lack resources. They are also experiencing challenges in pulling together and accessing the government resources that are available.

Being innovative is a challenge for rural communities and especially the resource-based sectors. For example, from a rural perspective, proposals for existing government programs (e.g. Atlantic Innovation Fund) are high level, industry specific investments. Support is needed for innovation that goes beyond science within a laboratory setting - an innovative business for instance. Innovation should be defined in a different way, and innovative ideas should be eligible. Communities should be empowered to be innovative as they can find new solutions to problems; however, some communities have encountered challenges or have failed due to the non-receptivity at the government level. It was noted that government bureaucracy and an attitude of “let’s find all the reasons why it won’t work or doesn’t fit” tended to be more common at the federal government level. This is probably due to the fact that rural stakeholders have closer working relationships with contacts at the provincial government level.

Existing assets and resources found in rural communities should be used more efficiently and further developed. One participant mentioned that the province of Nova Scotia did this with a small business lending program that was inexpensive for the government to develop and implement. Another stated:

*“In rural communities we often think of creating something new  
as opposed to looking at what is at play that is working.”*

## **4.2 Priorities for government collaboration**

Participants were invited to make suggestions as to what roles governments could play and what priorities should shape government activities, in addressing communities’ challenges over the next three to five years. These are presented under the relevant NRF areas of focus.

### **4.2.1 Sustainable Livelihoods**

Small businesses are the backbone of the economy, especially the rural economy. Governments should play a role in creating an environment to attract businesses in rural



communities and creating a province or Canada-wide competitive business environment. This should include reducing taxes and providing tax incentives for small businesses (e.g. multi-year plan).

Rural communities that depend on government as their main employer (e.g. armed forces base, etc.) need a real replacement when a government office closes (e.g. army base). This replacement should not simply be to provide money to communities but finding other sustainable industries (e.g. sea-based). Assistance should be provided in developing a plan, by sending professionals to assist communities facing this type of situation before they cease to exist, and by providing training to community members.

#### **4.2.2 Environmental Stewardship**

Governments should explore other energy sources as the oil crisis is real and will get worse. They should develop and implement programs that provide capital costs for solar and wind energy in Nova Scotia. One participant noted that every residence in Spain must have a solar energy component and the government, who estimates a payback of less than five years, is funding 75% of their energy conversions.

Governments should support communities in growing their own food to address some of the food security issues. It was noted that food bought in grocery stores can be transported 2,000 miles or more. Family and community gardens could be supported through tax incentives, and taxes could be increased on food based on where it comes from. This would level the playing field for local growers to compete in the food market.

Governments should look at how the Kyoto Accord could be implemented in ways that are supportive of programs.

#### **4.2.3 Innovative Approaches to Rural Infrastructure**

All levels of government should focus their efforts on building community capacity to ensure rural communities are healthy and sustainable, and should provide the necessary resources. This should include engaging, supporting and empowering citizens to come up with solutions to their challenges. People in rural areas are determined to survive in these regions but they need expertise to face challenges due to changing circumstances.

Both levels of government should work together to provide the necessary health care services, including: implementing emergency helicopter services to major hospitals; recruiting more doctors; and preparing for the “baby boomers” that will eventually need long-term care.

Governments should encourage and fund volunteer fire departments and emergency/first responder services, and establish transportation systems for people with special needs.

#### **4.2.4 Demographic Adaptation**

Governments should focus some of their efforts on controlling the youth out-migration as it is a threat to the sustainability of rural communities. They should work on creating a culture where youth are recognized as valuable community contributors. Governments should also develop programs and provide opportunities for youth to follow their passions.

### 4.3 Actions for governments

Participants were invited to make recommendations as to what actions governments should take to address the priorities identified in support of rural community viability.

All levels of government should collaborate with rural community stakeholders to develop policies that support healthy sustainable rural communities. They should also assist rural communities in developing their capacities by providing resources to gain the necessary skills. Experts should be brought closer to the situation in rural communities. As an example, one participant indicated that communities were worried about disappearing when cod fishing was forbidden in 1990. Governments should examine the role the cooperative sector (e.g. community owned cooperatives) and credit unions play in rural development and rural communities.

Governments should assist rural communities in developing long-term community plans. They should also develop immigration programs designed specifically to attract new Canadians to rural communities. Provincial and federal governments should allocate resources across communities and municipalities to move research to action in support of healthy sustainable communities.

Provincial and federal governments should build capacity within their own departments to then be able to assist and support communities and engage community citizens to come up with solutions to their own challenges. Governments should also develop programs and procedures that encourage community decision-making and provide the necessary support. The Community Access Program is very important to rural communities and should be continued.

Governments should develop and implement a system that measures the burden of regulations on business owners (e.g. factors such as time spent to apply and comply with regulations). They should also examine the existing regulations as some do not meet their original intent, and abolish the regulations that are no longer needed. The Government of Nova Scotia's Community Economic Development Fund should be expanded to become an Atlantic or national program with support from the Government of Canada through matching funds.

Governments should develop and implement sustainable, long-term fisheries policies to enable those working in this industry to move from primary to secondary production as there are multiple challenges and markets. The importance of such policies is reflected in the Coastal Communities Study prepared by Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

The Government of Canada should take some responsibilities in the area of education, particularly adult literacy - responsibilities which currently fall on provincial governments as per the *Employment Insurance Act*. It should also play a role in the destiny of rural development by increasing its infrastructure support such as giving communities access to educational facilities. As many community organizations also provide educational opportunities, they need support and funding (e.g. over a five-year period). Entrepreneurship opportunities and training should also be provided to youth.

Provincial and federal governments should review their apprentice programs to ensure incentives to work in small businesses are provided to address trade and labour shortage issues in rural communities. As one participant stated:

*“Apprenticeships and small businesses require money. A cycle develops where the small business owners train and larger companies steal.”*

The provincial government should consider amalgamating small towns to reduce over governance and form one viable community, which would assist community groups in getting ahead by working together. As an example, one participant indicated that five municipalities existed within a county of 17,000 in population.

#### **4.4 Roles for communities and stakeholders**

Participants were invited to make suggestions as to what roles communities and stakeholders should play in addressing the issues and approaches discussed.

Communities and stakeholders are limited in the roles they are able to play due to reduced and/or limited capacity. However, if they are encouraged to build their capacity, communities can provide leadership, support, skills and knowledge and participate in policy development. Communities have the ability to translate complicated concepts into practical applications if given the opportunity and capacity to do so. Communities and stakeholders of surrounding regions should also cooperate and work together.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant money and the Rural Communities Impacting Policy were cited as positive models where the needs of rural communities were matched with knowledge through teaching in the community, regardless of the literacy level, of what a policy is, how to influence policy and how someone impacts his/her community directly.

Communities should bring issues to the table and stakeholders should be involved in regional discussions to ensure that the community's perspective is always considered. Community leaders, stakeholders and organizations should become advocates and lobbyists to turn suggestions into actions, develop and implement solid, logical and viable action and community plans. Communities should evaluate the ongoing progress for implementing these plans so that adjustments can be made along the way.

Citizens and stakeholders of rural communities should buy into any community plan, as such well organized community meetings and easy to understand information are essential. Community leaders, stakeholders and organizations should take on roles and responsibilities to achieve results and assume responsibility through investments. People within communities could take on the roles of advisors, while governments should be held accountable in ensuring that community plans are supported.

A community learning model (e.g. Australia) should be followed by communities with the support of municipal governments. Municipal governments should invest in people by paying attention to the level of under-education within the community, financially supporting community learning centres and making other necessary investments as part of their immigration strategy. It was noted that 12 to 15 year olds are disconnecting from school and looking for somewhere to go.

Communities should be prepared for large disasters through the Emergency Measures Organization. Municipal councillors know their residents and who can be counted on to pull a group together. Many rural communities, who have seen the need, have formed and trained their own volunteer medical response team. In this context, one participant stated:

*“Don’t throw money at people. Get them to attend the Nova Scotia Community College with appropriate courses.”*

Communities could take advantage of their existing assets and work on developing these further. For instance, they could identify national historic sites (e.g. Birchtown - site of black loyalist landing).

#### **4.5 Projected outcomes and results**

Participants were invited to share the outcomes and results they expect from government actions over the next three to five years to address the priorities raised throughout the dialogue. Participants envisaged many positive outcomes for their communities.

If governments followed through on the issues outlined in this report, a number of strategies would be developed to support rural communities. Policy development would stand the test of time as it would involve a long-term strategy (e.g. 20 year vision) aligned with the goals of all levels of government.

- Community economic development strategies, promoting community sustainability, would be long-term ones.
- National transportation strategies would reflect the needs of both rural and urban communities.
- Communication strategies would be developed in consultation with rural citizens to ensure services that provide good information (e.g. Community Access Centres) remain in rural communities.

In terms of providing more efficient and adequate services to rural communities, appropriate government action would result in:

- the development of a long-term plan to deliver health care services to everyone close to their home communities, including planning for the needs of the future senior population (e.g. ten years from now);
- the provision of French services in regions that have Francophone minority groups;
- the consideration of needs of minority groups when developing policies, programs and services; and
- the development and implementation of infrastructure plans for sewage, water, health care and recreational facilities in communities.

Participants expect that Ministers would move research to action by demonstrating that they have a plan to build rural community capacity based on existing research. Ministers would move this plan forward by:

- evaluating the progress of their work;

- making changes to their plans along the way and when necessary;
- developing federal and provincial government policies that support community capacity building;
- providing resources to communities to build their capacities;
- establishing networks to share ideas, successes, etc.; and
- reviewing policies that do not support healthy sustainable rural communities.

Additionally, ministers would have made progress in forming viable communities from over-governed and over-taxed ones. They would have studied the “big picture” of the tourism, energy and other resource sectors. Support from governments to build community capacity would result in viable municipal governments where councillors and professionals are educated and knowledgeable, and where staff are well-trained.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEP**

Participants at the Hubbards Roundtable were very satisfied with the results of the event and felt that the event had exceeded their expectations.

The importance of economic development in rural communities was a key issue raised by a number of participants. Governments should build a more competitive environment through competitive tax and regulatory regimes and financial resources to attract businesses to rural communities. These businesses would in turn create employment opportunities for rural citizens and youth, thereby addressing labour shortages in rural communities. The fisheries sector brings in more revenue in rural Nova Scotia than all other sectors combined. That is why sustainable long-term fisheries policies are needed and rural communities that are dependent on this industry should plan to diversify their economies as it is vulnerable.

Throughout the discussions, participants emphasized the need to provide rural communities the necessary infrastructure to remain viable and sustainable. Technological infrastructure in particular is needed for small businesses to participate in Canada’s economy. Transportation infrastructure is needed to encourage tourism, to attract entrepreneurs to settle in rural communities, and to access services. Social infrastructure (e.g. health care, education, recreational facilities) is also needed to provide essential services to community members, to attract immigrants and entrepreneurs to rural communities, and to retain youth and seniors.

Participants stressed that governments should get closer to and gain a better understanding of rural issues and existing situations by working directly with communities. They also expressed that rural and urban communities should have the same level of influence on issues, policies, programs and services. Governments should change their programs and services to take into account the needs of rural communities. One of the key messages heard from a number of participants is best described using a quote from a participant who stated the following as an expected outcome:

*“Ongoing communication and engagement between departments, across levels of government and communities will be the standard. This includes the participation of the municipal governments.”*

To support communities in building their capacities, governments and communities should collaborate to develop and implement community plans, including evaluating and monitoring the progress. Community leaders, stakeholders, organizations and municipal governments should be provided resources, tools, skills and expertise to face challenges. All levels of government should engage, support and empower rural citizens to find solutions to their challenges.

As a next step, the Hubbards Roundtable discussions will help guide the federal and the Nova Scotia governments as they continue to explore opportunities for cooperative and joint action in support of rural community viability. Federal/provincial work to date on the proposed National Rural Framework has identified opportunities for collaboration in all five areas of focus: sustainable livelihoods; environmental stewardship; innovative approaches to rural infrastructure; engaged populations and institutions; and demographic adaptation.