International Dialogue on
National Climate Assessments
Session 1 presentation

National Assessment of Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation in Canada: Nature, Scope and Purpose

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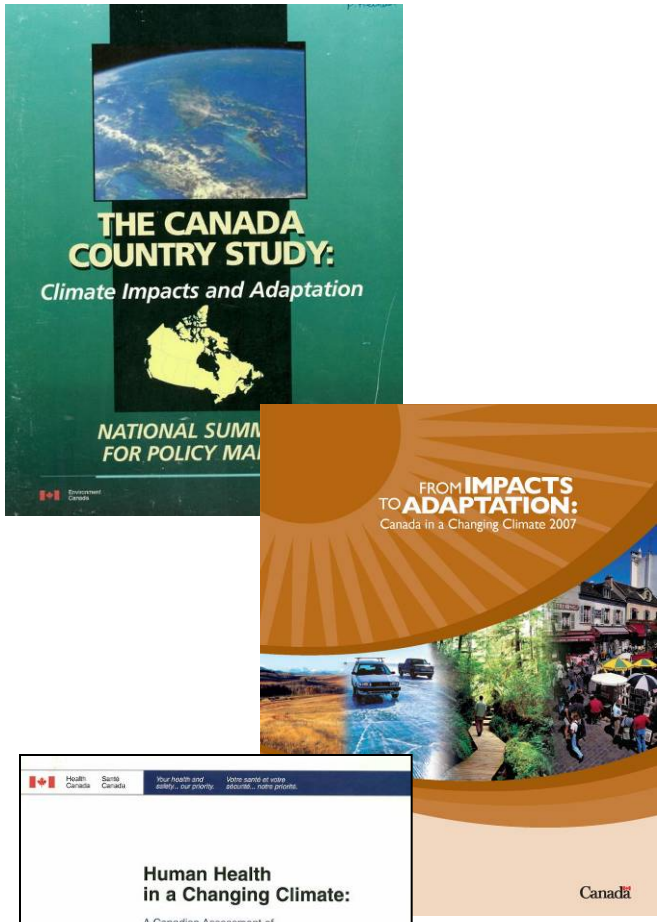
Past Science Assessments

- Canada Country Study (1998) – eight volumes (regions, sectors, cross-cutting issues)
- From Impacts to Adaptation: Canada in a Changing Climate (2008) – regions + international context
- Human Health in a Changing Climate (2008) – significant research component

Commonalities

- all lead by federal government as part of non-core funding
- science assessments (as opposed to risk / vulnerability assessments)
- policy neutral
- focus on impacts and adaptation, not climate science (or attribution)
- products – hard copy reports, web pdf & HTML



Ongoing and Planned Assessments

- Update to 2008 Assessment report (2013/14) – sectoral organization

- Sectoral Assessments (testing different approaches)
  - Coastal (2014/15)
  - Transportation (2015/16)
  - Mining (2015/16)

- Third National Assessment (2018?)
  – planning to begin once 2008 update is completed
  – likely (hopefully?) very different from previous

Note:

- again lead by federal government as part of non-core funding – but with clear policy mandate
- more rigorous institutional arrangements (Adaptation Platform)

2008 National Science Assessment: Purpose – to provide a comprehensive and authoritative understanding of the state of knowledge regarding climate change impacts and adaptation in Canada.

Goals

1. Inform adaptation decision-making
2. Raise awareness
3. Contribute to capacity building

Users

- Policy and science advisors – *feed into decision-making processes*
- Practitioners (engineers / planners)
- Industry
- University level instructors and students
- General public
- Media

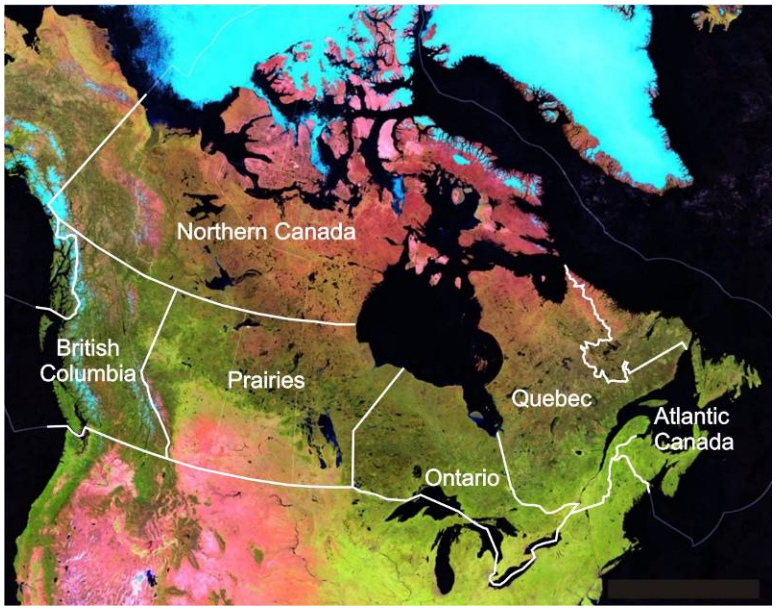
How determined?

- Need identified at program level
- Scoping workshop, included lessons learned from other assessments
- National advisory committee involving all levels of government, aboriginal organizations, practitioners and NGOs (INTENDED USERS)

2008 National Science Assessment – approaches used

Why a regional approach?

- Desire to increase political attention to issues – regions corresponded to provincial / territorial boundaries
- To that point – attention to impacts and adaptation very uneven across Canada
- Regional approach also provides advantages for discussing cumulative impacts and maladaptive practices



Why a science assessment?

- Deemed useful – abundance of information – sometimes conflicting – little applied to country as a whole
- More straightforward to provide "national" perspective than other types of assessments
- Resource limitations

Explaining Science Assessments

Definition:

Collective, deliberative processes by which experts review, analyze, and synthesize scientific knowledge in response to users' information needs relevant to key questions, uncertainties, or decisions (NRCNA, 2007).

Science Assessments are:

Scientific reports
Critical analyses of knowledge
Focused on issues of concern
Intended to inform decision-making

Science Assessments are not:

Policy, guidance or best practice documents
Literature reviews
Fully comprehensive reports
Intended to direct decision making

2008 National Science Assessment – approaches used

Sources of Information*

- peer-reviewed published literature
- grey literature
- local / practitioner knowledge

} includes traditional (Aboriginal) knowledge

* - failed miserably in getting authors to expand beyond "climate change" literature

Likelihood and Confidence

- use common-sense language rather than prescribed expressions
- confidence strongest where projections are consistent with historic trends and/or well established relationships

2008 National Science Assessment

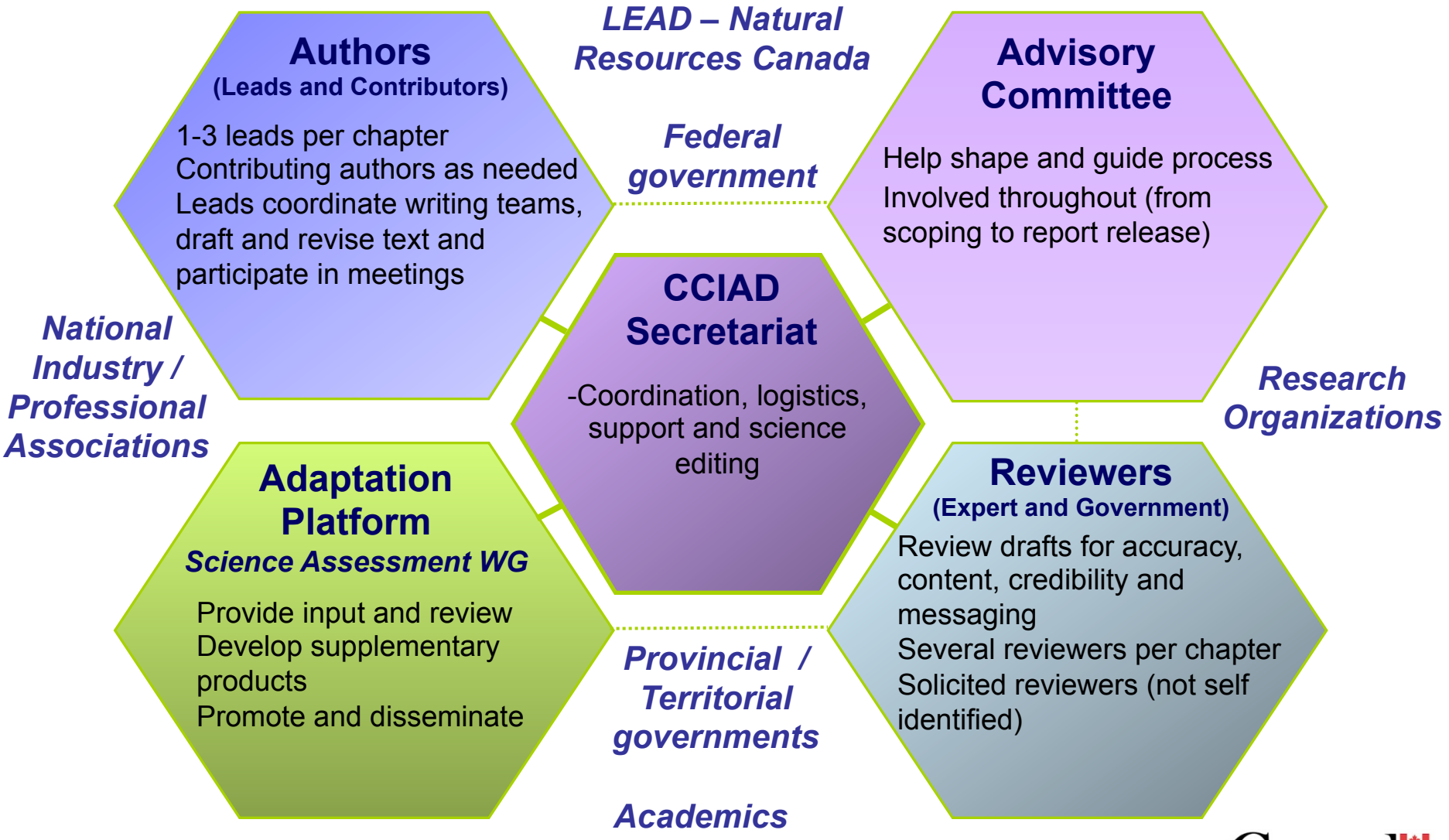
What we did right / well

- Focus on what we know
- Chapters start with key findings (4-5 points) of relevance to decision-making
- Use of Case Studies to provide detailed information
- Synthesis Report takes a concise, storyline approach

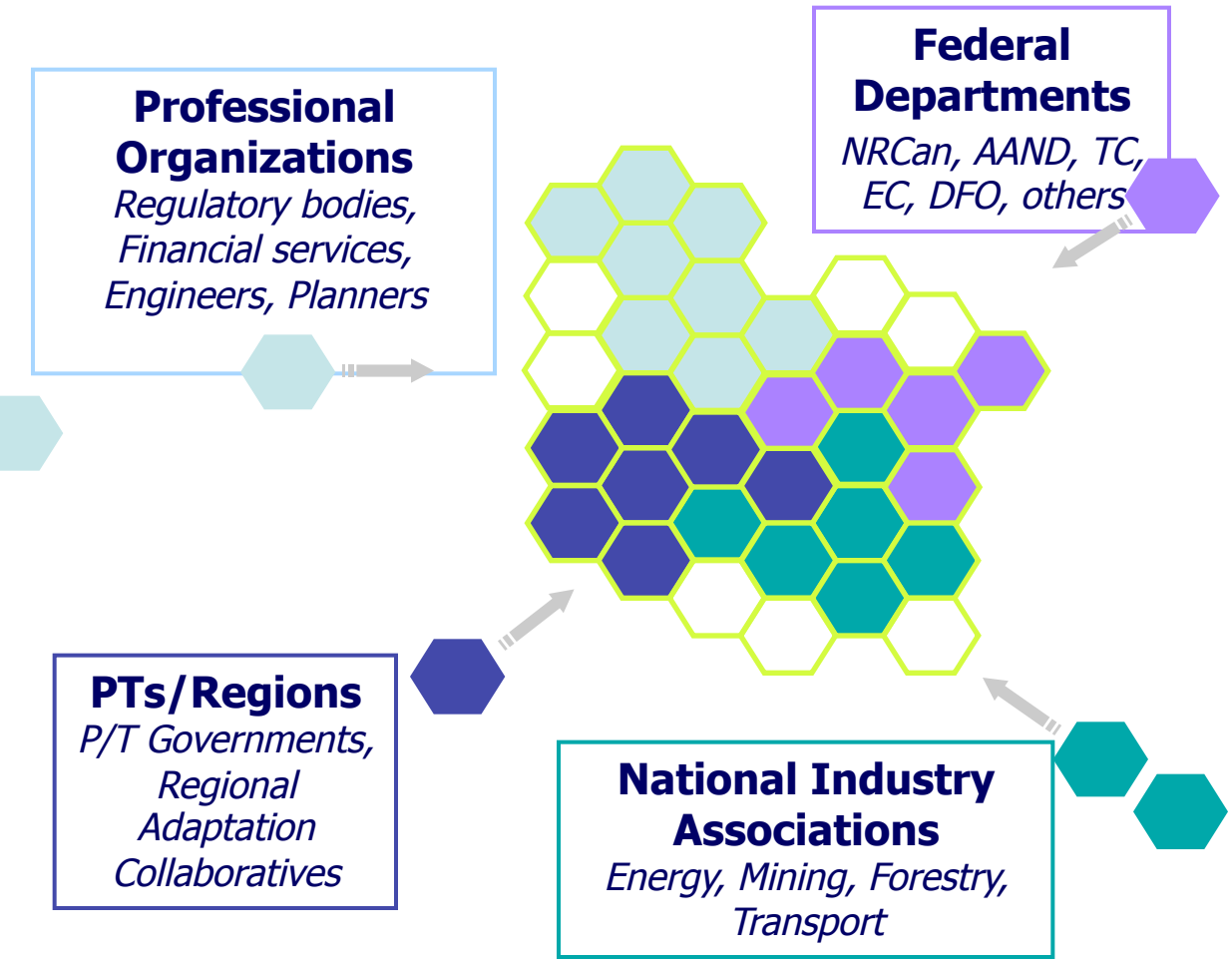
Where we could have done better

- Timing
- Products
- Communication – planning and implementation
- Monitoring / documenting impact

2012-2016 Assessments – Responsibilities and Governance



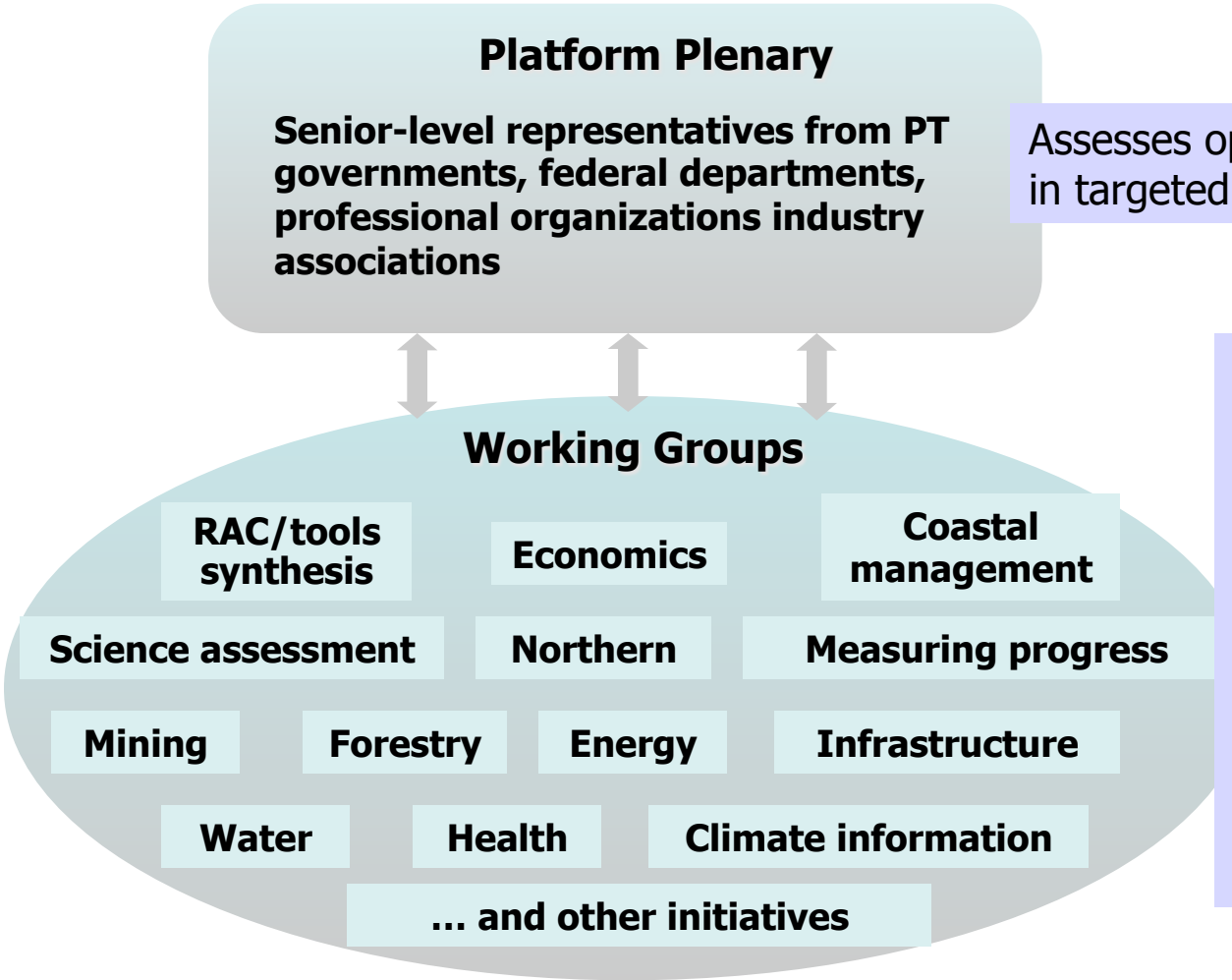
The Adaptation Platform provides the structure to enhance collaboration



- Mechanism for bringing together knowledge, capacity & financial resources
- Expanding the tent
  - + industry, financial sectors
  - + federal departments
- Each participating organization brings its own resources, priorities and mandate

Channelling diverse sources of knowledge into focused action

The Adaptation Platform



Assesses opportunities for action in targeted areas

Directly convenes information experts with differing backgrounds, skills perspectives, and training who together create new products, approaches distribution networks or solutions that more effectively assist decision-makers

Lessons learned

- Need to develop clear definitions of target audience(s) and scope early in assessment process
- As policy / economic / other context can change while assessment is being developed, assessment should be structured to inform these drivers but not be dependent on them
- Nobody reads the whole report! Need to find ways to draw readers beyond the "backyard" interest
- Planning and coordination of communication and product release is critically important – and can be challenging
- Gradual dissemination – percolate through peer networks - can be effective but takes time

Challenges

Governance

- Supporting a sustained (and sustainable) assessment process in the absence of core funding
- Expanding ownership of the process beyond federal government

Content

- Ensuring scientific rigour
- Communicating uncertainty
- Delivering relevant information across spatial scales

Resources and capacity

Products

- Conveying findings in innovative ways – use of new media
- Developing products targeted towards specific audiences (partnership with national associations?)