



THIS PHOTO ILLUSTRATES THE IMPORTANT ROLE GRASSROOTS ACTIVISTS WILL NEED TO PLAY IN MAKING THE TRANSITION TO A LOW-CARBON SOCIETY POSSIBLE AND POLITICALLY VIABLE.



# White paper on climate change actions in Canada

## Council of Canadians comments

The Council of Canadians welcomes the work of 60 scholars outlining tangible and necessary next steps for Canada to begin addressing climate change in the *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* position paper.

The Council of Canadians is one of Canada's leading progressive advocacy organizations with more than 100 000 grassroots supporters, and more than 50 local volunteer chapters across the country. Through our campaigns we advocate for clean water, fair trade, sustainable energy, public health care, and a vibrant democracy.

Climate change is clearly one of the most serious crises we collectively face, yet Canada is failing to contribute meaningfully to reducing climate pollution.

While we have seen some progress at the local and provincial levels, the federal government and certain provinces remain committed to an energy superpower vision based on unfettered oil, gas and mineral extraction. This has come not only at the expense of climate pollution reduction targets, but has also seen Canada walk away from the Kyoto

Protocol, gut federal environmental regulations, muzzle government scientists, attack environmental groups' charitable status and attempt to shut down civil society dissent<sup>1</sup>.

We welcome the invitation for a dialogue responding to the position paper launched by the Sustainable Canada Dialogues and believe this dialogue is best served by acknowledging and situating our comments in this context.

The Council of Canadians has long advocated for a Canadian energy strategy that meets people's needs, places meaningful regulatory limits on climate pollution and pursues a just transition to improved energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy. We see this as intimately linked to our call to oppose the free trade agenda of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), which undermines all levels of governments to regulate the sale or extraction of fossil fuels and promote renewable

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1 Barlow, M. (2015). Broken Covenant: How Stephen Harper Set out to Silence Dissent and Curtail Democratic Participation in Canada. Council of Canadians, <http://canadians.org/broken-covenant>, accessed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

energy. It is also connected to our demand for a national water policy that recognizes water as part of the commons, a public trust and a human right, ensuring it is considered in energy sector decision-making and beyond.

Our experiences campaigning in these areas offer insight to a number of the key policy orientations of the *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* position paper.

The Sustainable Canada Dialogues' key policy orientation (#3) of integrating the oil and gas sector into climate policies must be a priority. Canada's energy sector is our largest contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The tar sands, or oil sands, are the fastest-growing source of GHG emissions in Canada. This unconventional source of oil, requiring higher energy and water use to extract the sticky bitumen, is the third-largest proven oil reserve in the world. Production currently sits at around two million barrels per day. In 10 years, production is projected to reach 3.8 million barrels per day. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers expects industry to surpass five million barrels per day by 2030<sup>2</sup>. Regulatory approval has already been granted for 5.8 million barrels per day.

If allowed to expand as predicted by industry and government, the tar sands will effectively block Canada's ability to meet even our weak 2020 federal climate target<sup>3</sup>.

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2 Briefing note prepared for the Ontario Energy Board. Pembina Institute (2015). Energy East Consultation and Review: Submission on Final Technical Reports, pp. 3, accessed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

3 Environmental Defence and Greenpeace (2015). Digging a Big Hole: How Tar Sands Expansion Undermines a Canadian Energy Strategy That Shows Climate Leadership, accessed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015. <http://environmentaldefence.ca/reports/digging-big-hole-how-tar-sands-expansion-undermines-canadian-energy-strategy-shows-climate-l>

Pipelines are like the arteries that pump a heart; they are central to industry's ability to achieve planned expansion. Decisions being made in the coming months on infrastructure projects, such as Kinder Morgan's proposed 890 000 - barrels - per - day TransMountain pipeline expansion and TransCanada's 1.1 million-barrels-per-day Energy East pipeline, threaten to lock us into unsustainable tar sands expansion. Production is catching up to the capacity of transportation infrastructure. Decisions about major pipeline projects are linked to the ability of producers to achieve their expansion plans. Filling the Energy East pipeline alone would represent a close to 40% increase in tar sands production, or the climate pollution equivalent to adding seven million cars on the roads. This is an important reason why the Council of Canadians is actively campaigning to oppose projects like the TransMountain expansion and Energy East.

Despite the clear link between new pipeline infrastructure and the economic viability of tar sands expansion, the National Energy Board refuses to include upstream climate pollution impacts in their review of pipeline projects. With this in mind, we add to the recommendations, at minimum, **the inclusion of climate change considerations in the National Energy Board's review of pipeline projects. Any meaningful climate policy must put an end to tar sands expansion.** We advocate for all levels of government to recognize the risks involved in projects that facilitate further tar sands expansion, alongside other serious risks including concerns about pipeline safety<sup>4</sup> and the prospect of a diluted bitumen spill in waterways<sup>5</sup>. We call on governments to reject

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4 Council of Canadians (2014). Energy East: When the pipeline spills... , <http://canadians.org/sites/default/files/publications/EE-Safety-Briefing.pdf>, accessed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

5 Council of Canadians (2014). Energy East: Where oil meets water, <http://canadians.org/sites/default/files/publications/Waterways%20Report%20-%20final%20-%20web.pdf>, accessed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

these risks, take a strong public position against pipeline projects like Energy East and the TransMountain expansion, and use whatever measures are available to them in opposing the projects<sup>6</sup>.

On integrating the energy sector into climate policies, we also agree wholeheartedly that the **re-direct of fossil fuel subsidies to climate measures**, including improving energy conservation, energy efficiency, renewable energy expansion and public transit, is long overdue. We would add to the paper's recommendations that Canada should support **a financial transaction tax, or "Robin Hood tax"**<sup>7</sup>. This relatively simple measure has won support from diverse audiences<sup>8</sup>. It is a small tax on all financial market transactions that could generate significant funds towards ending poverty and addressing climate change.

We must also not forget about the role of direct regulation in achieving environmental goals. Too much focus in recent years has been on market-based solutions to the climate crisis. There can and should be room in our discussion for direct regulatory actions to reduce climate pollution and achieve broader environmental goals. Examples include **a moratorium on offshore drilling in the Arctic and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, federal regulation and oversight of fracking**<sup>9</sup>,

6 This includes examples such as political representatives being publicly opposed to the project (for example, the Vancouver and Burnaby Mayor's opposition to the TransMountain pipeline), withholding, or refusing needed permits that facilitate the project including on municipal and provincially owned land or needed hydro capacity for pumping stations, passing municipal resolutions and setting strict conditions the project needs to meet to get social licence from affected municipalities and provinces.

7 <http://robinhoodtax.ca/howitworks>, accessed on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

8 <http://www.robinhoodtax.org/who>, accessed on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

9 Lui, E. (2015). Members of Parliament Urged to Take Action on Fracking by Indigenous Lawyer and American Doctor. Blog. Council of Canadians, <http://canadians.org/blog/members-parliament-urged-take-action-fracking-indigenous-lawyer-and-american-doctor>, accessed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

**hard caps and timelines for phasing out all coal fire power, better regulation and enforcement of fossil fuel industries<sup>10</sup>, and a rejection of new nuclear developments.**

On including aggressive goals for low-carbon electricity production in federal and provincial climate action plans (Sustainable Canada Dialogues' key policy orientation #2), we add the importance of prioritizing **public and community ownership of renewable energy projects**. Public ownership models include crown corporations and public utilities. Community power models include local public ownership from municipalities and regional districts as well as First Nations and Indigenous ownership. It also includes consumer and member co-operative ownership models, and worker co-ops.

In a paper authored jointly with the Canadian Labour Congress, "Green, Decent and Public"<sup>11</sup>, we outline a number of distinct advantages of public and community ownership, including retaining economic revenues, maximizing social benefits, prioritizing conservation and ensuring energy security.

When power is kept in public and community hands, the likelihood of revenues being redistributed for further public good is increased. Public and community ownership also provides opportunities to ensure that the expansion of renewable power generation is accountable to the public interest and contributes to job creation and reduced inequality. Government action through public employment programs is far more likely than the market to provide job opportunities that help

10 <http://www.greenpeace.org/canada/en/Blogentry/alberta-where-we-only-prosecute-tarsands-viol/blog/46049/>, accessed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

11 Harden-Donahue, A. and Peart, A. (2009). Green, Decent and Public. Report of the Council of Canadians and the Canadian Labour Congress, <http://canadians.org/sites/default/files/publications/Green%20Decent%20and%20Public%20-%20Exec%20-%20FR.pdf>, accessed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.



reduce poverty and improve equity, building a fair and just green energy economy.

Government spending for training programs (associated both with renewable power and improving energy efficiency) can be directed towards workers who have lost their jobs (including those displaced in the transition away from fossil fuel industries) as well as towards people and communities facing poverty and systematic injustice or bearing the brunt of environmental and social impacts associated with the fossil fuel industry. For example, Columbia Hydro Constructors, the construction arm of B.C. Hydro, implemented employment equity programs in the late 1990s that provided training and opportunities for marginalized groups in the province.

Public and particularly community ownership models have also proven to be an important means to ensure that individual and collective concerns associated with potential renewable energy projects are heard. What better way to ensure local input is prioritized than to have the renewable energy project owned and run by community members? European cooperative models have clearly demonstrated this advantage<sup>12</sup>.

In being held accountable and measuring success not only through profitability but also through achieving social, economic and political objectives, public and community owned power also provides the means to prioritize increased energy conservation. The cleanest energy is the energy we don't have to use.

Further, public and community ownership remains the best way to insulate public policy choices from conflict with trade rules, including challenges emerging from NAFTA.

"Green, Decent and Public" also examines the clear opportunities presented in improving energy efficiency measures – Sustainable Canada Dialogues' key policy orientation #4 in the *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* position paper. There is a clear opportunity to both reduce climate pollution as well as address social inequity by supporting energy efficiency measures. Public funding towards **retrofitting programmes must prioritize areas that can reduce social inequity**, including communities facing the brunt of the environmental and social impacts of the fossil fuel industry, workers impacted by the shift to a low-carbon economy, and isolated and low-income areas.

"Green, Decent and Public" outlines a number of policy measures for various levels of government to support public and community ownership, and integrate social equity goals into energy efficiency measures. These include (but are not limited to):

- Provincial feed-in tariffs and other innovative policy mechanisms that reduce barriers connecting renewable power to provincial grids. This policy mechanism should be directed at supporting public and community power projects, as well as on-site renewables, small-scale renewable projects, and cogeneration on behalf of individual home or farm owners, businesses and industry.
- Government supports for lower-income households for housing retrofits and direct financing to acquire energy-efficient appliances and heating/cooling systems for low-income renters.
- Federal action to repeal the energy provisions of NAFTA and Chapter 11 and reject similar energy provisions in any future trade agreement.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

- Federal, provincial and municipal government policies that implement energy efficiency retrofits at public institutions, thereby leading by example.
- Government measures that ensure Demand-Side Management (DSM) programs fostering greater energy conservation are prioritized.
- Financing support from federal and provincial governments for public and community renewable power projects. This includes access to low-interest or forgivable loans and grants.
- Establishment of a Just Transition Fund to assist workers and communities affected by the shift to a low-carbon economy. This includes funding for skills training and green job development.

As highlighted, we see the goal of shifting to a low-carbon economy as closely linked with the protection of water. This relationship reflects the proposed key policy orientation #8 to safeguard biodiversity and water quality during Canada's transition to a low-carbon society, while aiming for net positive approaches when possible.

Canada and the world are not only facing a climate crisis but also a water crisis. Water is being polluted and overused at an astounding and unsustainable rate<sup>13</sup>. Addressing this crisis requires a fundamental change in our relationship with water, which is essential to life itself.

Canada needs a **national water policy based on the principle that water is part of the commons, a public trust and a human**

**right**<sup>14</sup>. The notion of the "commons" asserts that water is a common heritage to be shared, protected, managed and enjoyed by all. A commons framework requires a shift in water governance to prioritize the human right to water, public participation, and the inclusion of First Nation and other communities in decision-making processes. Public trust principles require governments to protect water sources for communities' reasonable use, and to make private use subservient to community rights. It is through this lens that new energy projects and the transition to a low-carbon society should be viewed<sup>15</sup>. If implemented, this would have serious implications for extreme energy, a group of new energy extraction methods that require more water, energy, and effort, and are more destructive to the environment and surrounding communities. Examples include tar sands development, hydraulic fracturing (fracking), mountaintop removal mining and deep water drilling. The extraction of extreme energy and associated transportation projects leave municipalities and Indigenous communities vulnerable to spills, associated health care costs, and the impacts of climate change on watersheds and water infrastructure.

Energy project decision-making must also respect the **free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples (FPIC)**, including the right to say "no." This is implied in Sustainable Canada Dialogues' key policy orientation #10, but needs to be clearly stated, despite the failure on the part of the federal government to acknowledge this internationally recognized right. Canada has the dubious distinction of being the only country to vote against the United Nations Declaration twice. This tension between

13 Barlow, M, and Clarke, T. (2007). *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

14 Lui, E. (2015). Water Chapter. *Alternative Federal Budget 2015*. Report, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Ottawa, pp. 83, accessed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

15 Ibid.

energy projects and respecting FPIC exists in several Canadian examples, including the proposed Site C dam in B.C.<sup>16</sup>.

The Council of Canadians appreciates this opportunity to provide feedback on the collection of texts, grounded in our experiences campaigning in these areas.

We hope the measures suggested here will be further considered. We will continue to demand better from our governments and work with our supporters, volunteer chapters, and allied organizations, groups and Indigenous communities towards realizing these measures in our work.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://canadians.org/action/stop-site-c-dam>, accessed on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015.



## ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

# THE COUNCIL OF CANADIANS

ANDREA HARDEN-DONAHUE

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Founded in 1985, the Council of Canadians is Canada's leading social action organization, mobilizing a network of 60 chapters across the country. Through our campaigns we advocate for clean water, fair trade, green energy, public health care, and a vibrant democracy. We educate and empower people to hold our governments and corporations accountable.

Join us and be part of a global movement working for social and environmental justice. We believe a better Canada and a fairer world are possible. Together, we turn that belief into action. The Council of Canadians is a registered non-profit organization and does not accept money from corporations or governments. Our work is sustained by the volunteer energy and generous donations of people like you.

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