

10. The Need for Federal Government Leadership on Climate Change

It is the Government of Canada that has ultimate responsibility for providing leadership on greenhouse gas reduction in Canada. Clearly, our national government cannot achieve its goals without strong co-operation from provincial and municipal governments. However, it is the Government of Canada that in the end decides whether or not to bind our country with respect to entry into and compliance with international agreements on greenhouse gas reduction.

The Government of Canada also sets important rules for vehicle fuel efficiency, air emission standards at power plants, and air emission standards adopted by the oil and gas industry. Moreover, Ottawa plays a major role in incenting oil and gas exploration, subsidizing fossil fuel extraction, and determining whether large oil sands projects with inter-provincial impacts will receive approval. If it chooses to, Ottawa has a broad array of spending and taxation powers that can be used to discourage fossil fuel consumption, and foster more sustainable forms of energy development.

The federal government is fully aware of the findings of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. However, it has chosen not to follow the advice of the IPCC. This is perhaps most clearly underlined by Prime Minister Harper's decision to withdraw Canada from its obligations under the Kyoto Protocol. Under Kyoto, Canada would have been obliged to achieve a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 6% below 1990 national emission levels by 2012. Canada's 1990 emission levels were 592 million tonnes (carbon dioxide equivalent).

Mark Bigland-Pritchard noted that Canada has become a signatory to the Cancun agreement, which is summarized below. Commitments made at Cancun were of a voluntary nature, and frequently lack ambition, but they did include strong representation from both developed and developing countries. In that context Canada has pledged a modest greenhouse gas emissions reduction of 17% below 2005 emission levels by 2020.

Cancún, 2010

“[The conference of the Parties] further recognizes that deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions are required according to science, and as documented in the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, with a view to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions so as to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and that Parties should take urgent action to meet this long-term goal, consistent with science and on the basis of equity...”

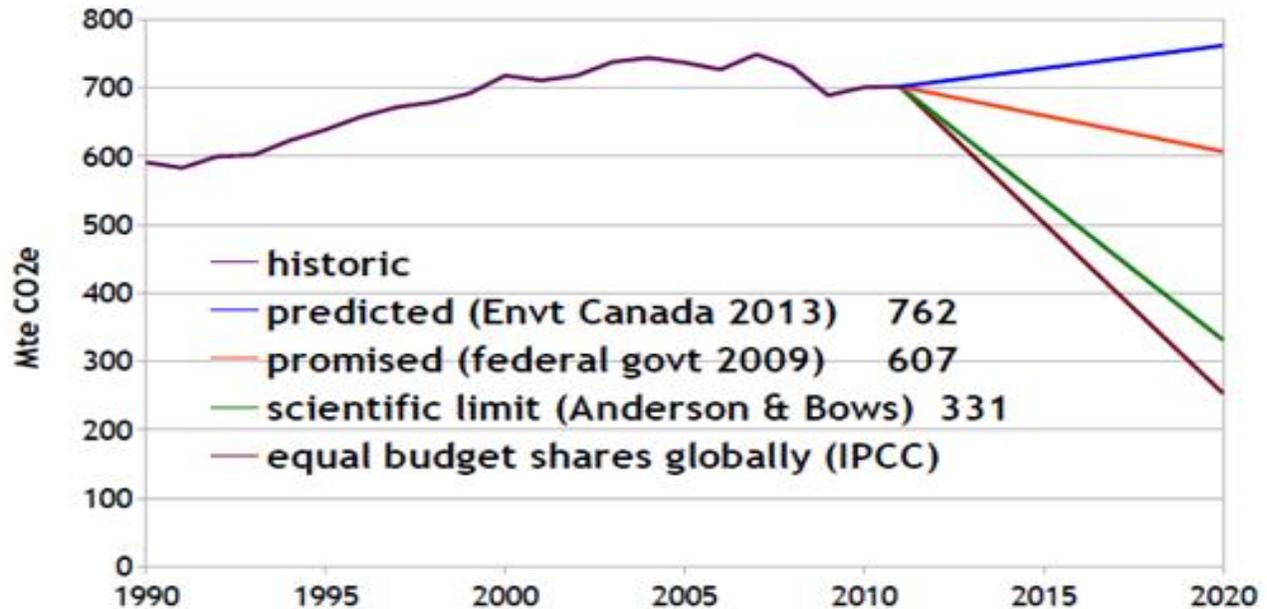
SLIDE PRESENTED AT THE HEARINGS BY DR. MARK BIGLAND-PRITCHARD

To date, with the exception of improvements in vehicle fuel efficiency in Canada, the Government of Canada shows little sign of adopting policy changes that would allow it to meet its 2020 target. To the degree that small national emission reductions have been achieved, they have largely been carried out at the provincial level, such as Ontario’s work to phase out coal fired power plants, and British Columbia’s carbon tax.

Mark Bigland-Pritchard noted that the new federal emission reduction targets bear little relationship to advice being given by the climate science community, which would require far deeper emission cuts. Moreover, a recent report from Environment Canada predicts that national emissions are set to rise again, driven up by growth in Canada’s oil sands industry.

Canada's emissions

Canada: GHG emissions 1990-2020



SLIDE PRESENTED AT THE HEARINGS BY DR. MARK BIGLAND-PRITCHARD

Mark Bigland-Pritchard, Kerri Munn Venn and Rick Morrell all suggested important policy changes at the federal level. Bigland Pritchard advocated further regulations and incentives to improve vehicle efficiency in Canada, and to advance the performance of electric vehicles. He also proposed the elimination of \$1.4 billion in federal subsidies to the fossil fuel industry.

Mark Bigland-Pritchard and Rick Morrell advocated shutting down all further development of the tar sands in Canada, and prohibiting approval of bitumen pipelines to move tar sands crude. **Three to four times more energy is used to extract oil from tar sands, compared to extraction of conventional oil.** Thus, the extraction process has a much larger greenhouse gas pollution footprint.

Karri Munn Venn stressed the importance of strictly regulating greenhouse gas emissions in the oil and gas sector, and increasing public investment in alternate energy. She expressed her disappointment in the federal government's lack of action in both these arenas. She also drew attention to **the success of the revenue neutral B.C. carbon tax in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in that province**, and urged the adoption of a national carbon tax.

Mark Bigland-Pritchard and Peter Prebble encouraged those attending the Citizens' Hearings to consider the idea of a national feed in tariff to promote renewable energy, a policy measure which has now been adopted by more than 60 countries. Under such a policy, premium rates are paid to homeowners, farmers, and businesses for installation of solar, biomass, geothermal and community wind power projects, reflecting the actual cost of these installations. In the absence of action by the Government of Canada, **the provincial governments of Ontario and Nova Scotia have adopted feed in tariffs**, but the rest of Canada has not.

Rick Morrell, also suggested federal incentives be provided for the installation of district heating systems, a means by which communities can heat with hot water or steam, with distribution of that heat managed by a central energy management facility in each neighbourhood or municipality. Morrell explained that by transitioning to hot water or steam for space heating, the energy needed to heat the water can be provided by a renewable energy source.

Finally, Diego Steinaker provided a valuable national perspective on the potential impact of improving grasslands management in Canada. He noted that more than half of Canada's 22 million hectares of rangeland are in poor condition due to overgrazing. **By improving range management in Canada and moving to lighter grazing practices, an additional 13 million tonnes of carbon can be stored.** That is the equivalent to taking 2.4 million vehicles off the road.