

Youth Brief on Bill C-12

SUBMITTED TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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January 30, 2021

Dear Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development Members,

We write to you today as a coalition of young people and youth-led organizations with respect to Bill C-12, the *Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act* (the “**Bill**”). We are appalled and frightened by the lack of urgency and accountability in the Bill as it is presently written. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the “**IPCC**”) states that limiting warming to 1.5°C will require “rapid and far-reaching [system] transitions” to lower greenhouse gas (“**GHG**”) emissions.¹ The federal government has declared a climate emergency,² yet has failed to accompany this declaration with a robust plan to combat this emergency.

Our generation and the generations to follow will face the consequences of prior emission-generating activities which have already induced an estimated 1.1°C of global temperature warming above pre-industrial levels.³ These emissions are the results of decisions that were made before we could vote, and in many cases, before we were even born, and have led to the global climate emergency we are now facing today.

We, as well as the generations to come after us, will bear the brunt of the climate crisis in the coming decades. It is our future that will be shaped by the strength or weakness of climate accountability laws passed today. Given that Canada and the other G20 members are together responsible for approximately 80 percent of global annual GHG emissions,⁴ our country’s actions will, in part, dictate the success or failure of the *Paris Agreement*. Yet the Climate Change Performance Index, which ranks the climate action of high-emitting countries, placed Canada 58th out of 61 in 2021.⁵

We know that Canada can and must do better. We deserve a bold plan that recognizes the importance of acting to reduce emissions now to secure a better future.

We present to you the following recommendations for the Committee to consider in amending the Bill.

¹ IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers” in V Masson-Delmotte et al, eds, *Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Meteorological Organization, 2018) at 17.

² Vote No. 1366, *Government Business No. 29 (National climate emergency)*, 1st Sess, 42nd Parl (as passed by the House of Commons 17 June 2019).

³ “2019 concludes a decade of exceptional global heat and high-impact weather” (3 December 2019), online: *World Meteorological Organization* <public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/2019-concludes-decade-of-exceptional-global-heat-and-high-impact-weather>.

⁴ “Brown to Green: The G20 Transition Towards a Net-Zero Emissions Economy 2019” (2019) at 11, online (pdf); *Climate Transparency* <www.climate-transparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Brown-to-Green-Report-2019.pdf>.

⁵ “Ranking”, *Climate Change Performance Index* (last visited 4 January 2021), online: <ccpi.org/ranking/>.

I. ALIGN WITH CLIMATE SCIENCE

Recommendation #1: Amend Section 6 of the Bill to legislate a 2030 target that aligns with the present climate science.

It is paramount that the Bill not selectively rely on climate science simply when it is politically convenient to do so. While the IPCC calls for net-zero GHG emissions by 2050, it also warned that global CO₂ emissions would need to fall by 45 percent (from 2010 levels) by 2030 in order to have our best chance at limiting warming to 1.5°C.⁶

We recommend that Section 6 of the Bill be amended to legislate a 2030 target that aligns with climate science. We cannot leave the brunt of the effort for future decades; the IPCC foretells that merely seeking to increase the scale and ambition of global efforts after 2030, and carrying out existing national policies in the meantime will ensure global warming of more than 1.5°C.⁷

We suggest that a legislated 2030 target call for, at minimum, a 50 percent reduction below 2005 levels to align with the IPCC's recommendation. It is imperative that Canada acts now to reduce its emissions. An ambitious legislated 2030 target is a pivotal step in compelling heightened reduction.

Recommendation #2: Amend the net-zero target in Section 6 of the Bill to include a minimum requirement for domestic emissions reductions below 2005 levels.

There are several ways in which a country can reach net-zero emissions. As it is difficult for a state to quickly stop emitting entirely, many national climate plans also rely on natural or technological greenhouse gas removal (“GGR”) techniques to offset emissions and allow states to receive carbon “credits” for financing efforts to reduce emissions elsewhere.

The Bill does not presently limit the use of these measures in achieving Canada's net-zero target. Undue reliance on these supplementary measures could deter actual emissions reductions and limit or otherwise forestall the co-benefits that come with significant emissions reductions, such as improved air quality, which alone could save Canadians up to \$114 billion every year.⁸ As such, it is critical that the Bill specify the role of these measures in Canada's journey towards a net-zero target. Sweden's *Climate Act* requires that the state achieve net-zero emissions by 2045 at the latest, while imposing a requirement that domestic emissions be cut by at least 85 percent below 1990 levels, resulting in a maximum of 15 percent of emissions

⁶ IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers” in V Masson-Delmotte et al, eds, *Global warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Meteorological Organization, 2018) at 20.

⁷ *Ibid* at 20.

⁸ Health Canada. *Health Impacts of Air Pollution in Canada*. (2019), online: <publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.874080/publication.html>.

that can be offset by other measures.⁹ We recommend that Canada's Bill adopt the same ratio for its net zero goal.

It is important that Canada prioritizes the role of emissions reductions in this Bill over GGR techniques. Emissions from the oil sands have increased by a staggering 560 percent since 1990.¹⁰ Environment and Climate Change Canada projects that, by 2030, the oil and gas sector will contribute more than 40 percent of the emissions permissible under Canada's present 2030 target.¹¹ Such domination of Canada's carbon budget would require Canada's remaining sectors to decrease emissions by unrealistic amounts to accommodate the continued expansion of the oil and gas sector,¹² and is likely to lead to undue reliance on GGR techniques to decrease our total emissions.

The time for business-as-usual has passed. The oil and gas sector can only continue its unabated growth at direct expense to our future. This Bill should contain measures to ensure that emissions from this and other high-emitting sectors do not impede Canada's ability to meet its climate targets. Requiring a minimum amount of emissions reduction, as suggested in this recommendation, is one such way to do so.

II. INCORPORATE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Recommendation #3: Amend Section 8 of the Bill to state that "the Minister must take into account the best scientific information available as well as contextualized Indigenous knowledge" in setting targets and making plans to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Indigenous Peoples are uniquely situated to be leaders in climate change mitigation and adaptation, as their knowledge systems originate from and remain connected to the various lands upon which they have inhabited and cohabited with since time immemorial. This knowledge is filled with observations about the environment, including information about living with impacts of a changing climate and adapting to climate change.

These systems are holistic in encompassing and connecting all the elements – the living, non-living, and all of creation – and focus on building relationships of respect and reciprocity. For

⁹ *Sweden's Climate Act and Climate Policy Framework* (26 October 2020), online: *Swedish Environmental Protection Agency* <www.swedishepa.se/Environmental-objectives-and-cooperation/Swedish-environmental-work/Work-areas/Climate/Climate-Act-and-Climate-policy-framework/-/>.

¹⁰ Environment and Climate Change Canada, "2020 National Inventory Report: 1990-2018: Greenhouse Gas Sources and Sinks in Canada" at 56.

¹¹ "2018 Canada's Greenhouse Gas and Air Pollutant Emissions Projections" (2018) at 10, online (pdf): *Environment and Climate Change Canada* <publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/eccc/En1-78-2018-eng.pdf>.

¹² Environmental Defence & Stand.Earth, "Canada's Oil & Gas Challenge: A Summary Analysis of Rising Oil and Gas Industry Emissions in Canada and Progress Towards Meeting Climate Targets" (2018) at 12, online (pdf): *Stand.Earth* <www.stand.earth/sites/default/files/Canadas_Oil%2BGas_Challenge.pdf>.

these reasons, Indigenous knowledge systems cannot be parsed up or taken out of context without losing some of their meaning. Though Indigenous peoples are unique in their language, culture, practices, beliefs, and governance, there are commonalities in how Indigenous worldviews need to be respected. These systems inform a way of life, and are not pieces of information that can simply be extracted.

Though scientific knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge are two distinct forms of knowledge production, creation and verification, and one should not seek to validate the other, there are existing collaborative frameworks, such as Two-eye seeing or Ethical Space, that could be used to operationalize the braiding of diverse knowledge systems for our collective future. Indigenous knowledge should be used to inform climate policies and adaptation responses and should be considered alongside science.

III. CLIMATE JUSTICE

Recommendation #4: Amend Section 8 of the Bill to require the Minister to consider the responsibilities of Canadians towards future generations.

Once carbon dioxide is added to the atmosphere, it remains there for 300 to 1,000 years.¹³ Our generation, as well as those who come after us, will thereby bear the brunt of the impacts caused by emissions emitted today and decisions made about future emissions reductions. It is thus imperative that an intergenerational equity lens be considered when making climate policy decisions.

We suggest the adoption of the language of Bill C-232, the *Climate Emergency Action Act* sponsored by Winnipeg Centre MP Leah Gazan, which calls for the Minister to consider “the responsibilities of Canadians towards future generations” in developing a climate emergency action framework.¹⁴

Recommendation #5: Amend Section 21 of the Bill to ensure that the composition of the advisory body includes representation from groups who are disproportionately affected by climate change, including youth, women, and Indigenous peoples.

The impacts of climate change are not borne equally or fairly by all Canadians. Existing societal inequities - including those based on race, gender, income, disability, language and age - can be exacerbated by climate impacts. To address these disproportionate impacts, it is pivotal that advice provided to the government on climate policy matters reflects the views of these groups of people.

¹³ “Alan Buis, “The Atmosphere: Getting a Handle on Carbon Dioxide” (9 October 2019), online: *NASA Global Climate Change* <climate.nasa.gov/news/2915/the-atmosphere-getting-a-handle-on-carbon-dioxide/>.

¹⁴ Bill C-232, *An Act respecting a Climate Emergency Action Framework*, 2nd Sess, 43rd Parl, 2020 (first reading February 26 2020).

Subsection 20(1) of the Bill establishes an advisory body to guide the Minister on achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. While groups that are and will be disproportionately affected by climate change ought to be adequately represented on the advisory body, the Bill does not presently contain any requirements on the composition of the advisory body.

The BC *Climate Change Accountability Act* requires that the advisory committee established under that Act must be made up of at least 50% women and have at least one representative from each of the following groups: Indigenous peoples; local governments; environmental organizations; academics; unions; persons living in rural and remote communities; and the business community.¹⁵

It is particularly important that the advisory body be mandated to include Indigenous representation, and that a variety of Indigenous perspectives be included to acknowledge the different experiences and realities of different Indigenous populations across Canada and avoid pan-Indigeneity.

It is also critical that the advisory body include youth representation, as it is our futures which are most at stake.

Recommendation #6: Amend Section 8 of the Bill to mandate that the Minister consider the objective of not exceeding Canada’s “fair share” of emissions in setting Canada’s emissions targets.

A handful of countries, including Canada, are both disproportionately responsible for the emissions in our atmosphere and more financially capable to undertake the efforts needed to reduce emissions. As Canada is responsible for 1.7 to 1.8 percent of the cumulative emissions in our atmosphere¹⁶ and was the 11th highest-emitting state in 2018,¹⁷ Canada ought to bear a notable portion of the global mitigation burden.

Considering Canada’s “fair share” of the global emissions reductions required to limit warming in setting our targets helps ensure that Canada does its part in addressing the climate crisis and does not pass the burden onto other states who are less responsible for causing climate change or less capable to fund mitigation efforts. Until Canada and other high-emitting states accept responsibility for the climate crisis and adopt aggressive targets that reflect this burden, other nations may be disincentivized from taking on more ambitious climate efforts.

¹⁵ *Climate Change Accountability Act*, SBC 2007, c 42.

¹⁶ Eric Kemp-Benedict et al, “The Climate Equity Reference Calculator” (2019), online: *Climate Equity Reference Project* <calculator.climateequityreference.org>.

¹⁷ “Each Country’s Share of CO2 Emissions”, *Union of Concerned Scientists* (last updated 12 August 2020), online: <www.ucsusa.org/resources/each-countrys-share-co2-emissions>.

Scotland's *Climate Change Act* includes a set of target-setting criteria which includes "the objective of not exceeding the fair and safe Scottish emissions budget".¹⁸ The Act defines the fair and safe Scottish emissions budget as follows:

[T]he aggregate amount of net Scottish emissions of greenhouse gases for the period 2010 to 2050 as recommended by the relevant body as being consistent with Scotland, in line with the principles set out in article 3 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, contributing appropriately to the holding of the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.¹⁹

It is only once Canada pledges and undertakes to meet its fair share of the global mitigation burden that it can then ask other countries to do the same.

IV. INCREASE ACCOUNTABILITY

Recommendation #7: Amend Section 10 of the Bill to require the governments' emission reduction plans to detail how Canada will meet its five-year target.

Presently, Section 10 of the Bill requires an emissions reduction plan to contain key emissions reduction measures and strategies as well as relevant sectoral strategies that intend to achieve the emissions reduction target. The Bill does not require Canada, however, to outline measures that together lead to the amount of reduction required to meet its target.

Canada has never met any of the numerous emissions reduction targets it has set.²⁰ Since setting its first target in 1992, Canada's national annual emissions have actually increased by a net total of 117 megatonnes (16 percent).²¹

The Pan-Canadian Framework, launched by the Canadian government in late 2016, contains multi-sectoral initiatives intended to guide our emissions reduction towards our target. Over 20% of the required reductions contained in the PCF, however, were to come from "unspecified future initiatives."²² In the four years since this plan's release, the current government has failed to update it to indicate how Canada will meet its 2030 target.

¹⁸ *Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019*, S 5 2B(1)(a).

¹⁹ *Ibid*, S 5 2B(2).

²⁰ Julia Croome et al, "A New Canadian Climate Accountability Act: Building the legal foundation to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050" (May 2020), online (pdf): *West Coast Environmental Law* <www.wcel.org/sites/default/files/publications/a_new_canadian_climate_accountability_act_-_detailed_report_compressed.pdf>.

²¹ "Greenhouse Gas Emissions" (last modified 15 April 2020), online: *Environment and Climate Change Canada* <www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-indicators/greenhouse-gas-emissions.html>.

²² Andrew Gage, "Are politicians really standing up for our climate with the Pan-Canadian Framework?" (14 December 2016), online: *West Coast Environmental Law* <www.wcel.org/blog/are-politicians-really-standing-our-climate-pan-canadian-framework>.

We are frustrated with the continued rhetoric of climate action that leads to negligible emissions reduction. A robust plan needs to include a map of the measures that detail how Canada will meet its 2030 target.

Recommendation #8: Amend Section 2 to redefine the term “milestone year” as including the year 2025.

As the Bill presently stands, Canada’s first milestone year is 2030. Under S7(1) of the Bill, the Minister must set a national interim target for each milestone year to work towards achieving the 2050 target.

If Canada’s first milestone year is not until 2030, then the Minister’s first progress report (under S14(1) of the Bill) would not occur until 2028. We should not have to wait that long to receive an update on the progress made towards Canada’s targets. By this point, the opportunity to radically decrease our emissions by 2030 will nearly be behind us.

By amending Section 2 to include the year 2025 as a milestone year, the Minister would be obligated to prepare a progress report in 2023. Given the global emergency at hand, we believe that this is a much more appropriate timeline.

V. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Amend Section 6 of the Bill to legislate a 2030 target that aligns with the present climate science.

Recommendation #2: Amend the net-zero target in Section 6 of the Bill to include a minimum requirement for domestic emissions reductions below 2005 levels.

Recommendation #3: Amend Section 8 of the Bill to state that “the Minister must take into account the best scientific information available as well as contextualized Indigenous knowledge” in setting targets and making plans to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

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Recommendation #6: Amend Section 8 of the Bill to mandate that the Minister consider the objective of not exceeding Canada’s “fair share” of emissions in setting Canada’s emissions targets.

Recommendation #7: Amend Section 10 of the Bill to require the governments' emission reduction plans to detail how Canada will meet its five-year target.

Recommendation #8: Amend Section 2 to redefine the term "milestone year" as including the year 2025.

VI. CONCLUSION

Canada and other high-emitting states must take bold climate action to reduce their emissions to limit the extent of further global warming. While limiting global temperature increases to 1.5°C will not fully prevent the negative impacts of climate change, it will reduce the scope and severity of devastation worldwide.²³ The UN IPCC warns that even a total warming of 2°C will expose hundreds of millions of additional people to water scarcity, heat waves, and lower crop yields.²⁴

We fear that Bill C-12, as presently written, will not compel Canada to undertake sufficient mitigation efforts. We ask that you consider our recommendations to strengthen Bill C-12. As youth, our future hangs in the balance.

Sincerely,

Organizations

Youth Climate Lab

Divest Canada Coalition

Canadian Youth Alliance for Climate Action

Climate Strike Canada

Leading Change Canada

Global Shapers Vancouver Hub

Sustainabiliteens Vancouver

²³ IPCC, "Sustainable Development, Poverty Eradication and Reducing Inequalities" in V Masson-Delmotte et al, eds, *Global warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Meteorological Organization, 2018) 445 at 447.

²⁴ *Ibid* at 453. This statistic is in comparison to the harms caused by allowing 1.5°C of global warming to occur.

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Prachir Pasricha

Kayla Dharamshi

Georgia Gopinath

Halina Rachelson

Judy Patterson

Erick Carreras

Albesa Aliu

Chandra Chisholm

Samia Sami

Austin Tahiliani

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Sigourney Shaw

Mika Yasutake

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