

Dr. Robert McLeman
Cambridge, ON

17 May 2021

House Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Dear members of the Committee:

Subject: Written brief re Bill C-12 Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act

Please accept this short brief for your consideration with respect to Bill C-12. Please note that I am Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University and a leading international expert on how climate change affects human migration, displacement, and security. I was nominated by Environment and Climate Change Canada to serve with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), where I am currently Coordinating Lead Author for the IPCC's upcoming Sixth Assessment Report on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change. For the IPCC I coordinate a team of twelve international scientists currently assessing the available scholarly knowledge of how climate change affects health, wellbeing, migration and violent conflict. I am also currently a contributing author to a national assessment report of climate change impacts and adaptation commissioned by Natural Resources Canada. In recent years I have provided advice on climate change impacts on migration and displacement to Global Affairs Canada, the US State Department, Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Energy, several UN agencies, the German Development Institute, the World Bank, and the OECD. I would like to offer the committee the following comments regarding Bill C-12.

1. Lack of binding emissions reductions targets: The Government of Canada has failed to comply with past commitments it has made with respect to greenhouse gas emissions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the Kyoto Protocol and the Copenhagen Accord, and, given current emissions reported by Environment and Climate Change Canada, is unlikely to meet its commitments under the Paris Agreement. The underlying reason for this is that there have been no consequences for failure to meet Canada's commitments. Bill C-12 again creates a situation where there is no immediate consequence should the Government fail to meet its stated commitments. My recommendation is that there be binding requirements to meeting Canada's net zero commitments. I do not have a specific prescription in this regard, but it is notable that Canadian youth in several provinces are currently bringing legal actions against governments for failure to reduce emissions; some formal mechanism for seeking redress on behalf of young people – who are ultimately the ones who would need to deal with the consequences of inaction – might be one prospective avenue.

2. Milestones and ongoing accountability: Achieving zero-emissions will be a challenge, and there is great temptation for elected governments that have a maximum five-year mandate to make few difficult decisions during their own mandate and defer these to future governments. The chances of achieving net zero emissions will be greater if there are formal ongoing metrics and intermediate targets, with regular public reporting of results and a requirement to state in writing in advance the government's plans for achieving its next milestones.

3. Formal partnerships with provincial governments and scientists: Greenhouse gas emissions in Canada are unevenly distributed by province/territory: Western provinces have that fastest rates of emissions increases, while Ontario and Quebec have the most modest levels of increase. Hope of achieving net zero will require the advisory committee consist of permanent provincial government representatives committed to helping achieve ongoing milestones. At the same time, this committee needs strong apolitical representation of knowledgeable scientists that can offer advice on mitigation pathways and options, and provide a “reality check” on an ongoing basis vis a vis the government’s progress toward net zero.

I trust the Committee will find these suggestions useful, and I would be happy to appear before Committee members to provide additional information if desired.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. McLeman', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Professor Robert McLeman