

We, the people of Canada, stand at a crucial juncture. Our choices will affect us gravely now and into the future, and our government bears responsibility for shaping that future. Canada has positioned itself as a global leader in the fight against the climate crisis - but our actions are simply not congruent with those words.¹ More can and must be done.

Canada's reliance on fossil fuels must phase down. They destroy our biosphere and are plunging us into disaster and devastation the world has never experienced. They cost us billions of dollars per year in subsidies² for weak revenues and a demand that is dwindling. We must not prop up this industry any longer, but allow our economy to transition to a model that invests in genuinely sustainable energy sources, protects the environment and also addresses other health and social inequities. It may not be easy - but it is necessary.

An enforced, effective *Climate Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act* (Bill C-12) and its subsequent plan for getting to net zero would move us forward into the thriving low carbon era arriving across the globe. It would build our economy and society as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

But if the government passes a bill that by its design will not work, Canadians will miss this critical opportunity to mitigate future impacts of the climate crisis. The clock is ticking. The hour is already late. The future stands to be perilous without strong action based on science, traditional Indigenous knowledge and the common good. We must get this legislation right.

Benefits of a Strong Climate Accountability Act

An effective climate accountability act and plan would offer numerous benefits^{3,4,5}:

1. It would partner us with progressive nations who are already lowering their greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid the worst effects of the climate crisis. It would position Canada as being a true global leader on the climate crisis.

¹ Climate Change Performance Index 2021 (<https://ccpi.org/>). Germanwatch. December 7, 2020. Based on overall climate performance, Canada is ranked 58th out of 61 countries that collectively account for over 90% of the world's global greenhouse gas emissions.

² "Federal Fossil Fuel Subsidies 2020", Environmental Defence, April 2021. https://environmentaldefence.ca/report/federal_fossil_fuel_subsidies_2020/

³ "A Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy", Environment and Climate Change Canada, December 11, 2020. https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/eccc/documents/pdf/climate-change/climate-plan/healthy_environment_healthy_economy_plan.pdf

⁴ "Mapping the co-benefits of climate change action to issues of public concern in the UK: a narrative review", The Lancet, September 2020. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(20\)30167-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(20)30167-4/fulltext)

⁵ "12 Reasons Climate Action Is Good for the United States Economy", World Resources Institute, November 25, 2019. <https://www.wri.org/insights/12-reasons-climate-action-good-united-states-economy>

2. It would create true accountability for ensuring that Canada meets its commitment of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, and provide the legislative framework needed to make that happen.
3. It would allow our economy to avoid the damaging impacts of the inevitable fossil fuel crash. Oil and gas subsidies and production could be phased down as we replace their energy with truly sustainable sources. Many new jobs and revenue sources would emerge, making Canada's economy strong. Our nation would move into the low carbon era, meeting the needs of the economy and the people.
4. Canada's biosphere could start to recover. Our physical and mental health would benefit from lower emissions and an increased interconnectivity with nature.
5. A sense of community with First Nations could grow as we work together on this urgent recovery, and collectively reap its benefits.
6. A sense of optimism could prevail that we Canadians and our government are facing the most crucial crisis of our time -- with a complexity that extends far beyond the climate and includes biodiversity and social, economic and racial justice -- and solving it together.
7. Finally, it would help to create a safer, greener present and future for our loved ones, communities and people everywhere.

While the need is critical and the opportunity is great, the Government of Canada has offered us a bill with crucial omissions. We cannot accept it as is. Changes must be made.

Recommendations for Strengthening Bill C-12

In line with recommendations put forward by Climate Action Network Canada⁶, Toronto350 makes the following recommendations for strengthening Bill C-12:

Recommendation 1: Set a 2025 target and be consistent with the best available science, international obligations, and equity principles.

True accountability is not a burden you impose on a future government nine years down the road -- especially in the face of an emergency that grows more dire with each passing year.

⁶High-Level Recommendations for Bill C-12, the Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act, Climate Action Network Canada, November 25, 2020. <https://climateactionnetwork.ca/2020/11/25/technical-recommendations-for-bill-c-12-the-net-zero-emissions-accountability-act/>

True accountability is a commitment you make now, and you demonstrate that commitment through your immediate actions. Passing a climate accountability act without a 2025 target is a clear indicator that the government is not taking its suggestion of accountability seriously. If it wishes to demonstrate otherwise, the government must include a commitment to setting a 2025 target in Bill C-12.

Recommendation 2: Impose a strong legal obligation to meet the established targets.

One cannot have real accountability without the risk of consequence. To quote Mahatma Gandhi, ““It is wrong and immoral to seek to escape the consequences of one's acts.” A climate accountability act without risk of consequence is not an accountability act at all -- it is more akin to a wishful thinking act. Canada deserves better. The government must do better.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen the Advisory Body's role in establishing targets, plans and reports.

While a government will consider an advisory committee's recommendations, they are under no obligation to accept them. Too often, we see governments appoint advisory bodies and then fail to heed their well-informed advice due to political self-interest. This cannot be permitted to happen with the Net-Zero Advisory Body. Advisory Body members have been appointed due to their expertise, and the government must take full advantage of that expertise by providing the Advisory Body with a clear mandate and giving them a leadership role in defining Canada's climate action plan.

Recommendation 4: Prescribe strong standards for planning and reporting.

Ultimately, it will be our children and our children's children who will decide if we were truly committed to meeting our emissions reduction targets. But their judgement will come too late. Canadians in the here and now bear the responsibility of ensuring that we do everything we can to meet our net-zero emissions target. We need strong planning and reporting mechanisms to create both the accountability and transparency needed to succeed with such a massive undertaking. These mechanisms must be enshrined in legislation, to ensure that Canada's plans and progress are visible, measurable and achievable.

Recommendation 5: Enable the Federal government to take a strong leadership role across the provinces. Incentivize and facilitate provincial action. Support shared action.

One lesson that too many of Canada's politicians have failed to fully grasp is that the climate crisis is much bigger than partisan politics. While we truly hope that future political leaders will understand this, we need to ensure that partisanship is not a barrier to effective climate action. Bill C-12 can and should be the vehicle for ensuring this is the case, by giving the Federal government more authority to support and direct climate action at the provincial level.

Recommendation 6: Ensure Indigenous peoples can be full participants in climate action.

Indigenous peoples have been among the most powerful advocates for the need to address the climate crisis. And Indigenous communities will be among the most impacted if we are not successful in changing its course. Indigenous peoples have deep, untapped wisdom and experience to share on the topic of environmental stewardship, and we need to listen to that wisdom and experience, learn from it and work with Indigenous peoples as equal partners.

Recommendation 7: Ensure a just and equitable transition for workers affected by the shift to renewable energy.

Toronto350 empathizes with Canadians who fear how climate action will impact their communities and chosen careers, and the livelihoods of themselves and their families. A strong transition plan to green, low-carbon sustainable fields, including renewables, would transform those fears into hope, making those Canadians key allies in the fight against the climate crisis. Everyone has a role to play in reducing Canada's climate emissions, and the government must ensure that those who will be most impacted have the support they need to fill their role.

To be the effective legislation that Canadians want and need, Bill C-12 must be amended, completed and passed with these essential recommendations included.

A Collective Call To Action

Climate action groups are working hard to demand strong climate accountability legislation, and Canadians want the government to take meaningful action to address the climate crisis. We call on you to heed that call. We need strong climate action that will work, and that will set us on a bright new path.

Most Canadians reject half measures which favor corporate interests that threaten our safety and well-being.⁷ Subsidies to the fossil fuel industry must stop. Canada must shift its focus from the unsustainable to the sustainable -- including renewable (wind and solar) energy sources, and other forms of human, social, environmental and economic sustainability. Many countries, including Sweden, the UK, Denmark, Norway and Chile are vastly outperforming Canada on climate action, and the performance gap is growing.^{8,9} Canada is being left behind, and we must take much bolder action in order to meet its goal of net-zero emissions by 2050.

⁷"Poll: Canadians want Canada to be seen as determined to fight climate change, producers of sustainable products, and increasingly associated with renewable energy", Clean Energy Canada, December 11, 2020.

<https://cleanenergycanada.org/canadians-want-canada-to-be-seen-as-determined-to-fight-climate-change-producers-of-sustainable-products-and-increasingly-associated-with-renewable-energy/>

⁸ Climate Change Performance Index 2021. <https://ccpi.org/>

⁹ Climate Change Performance Index 2021 - Canada. <https://ccpi.org/country/can/>

We as Canadians are ready to help. We are prepared to use our labor and talents to ensure climate balance is restored and that Canada creates an economy that makes sense for the people and the planet. We will work with our fellow Canadians with pride as we increase our sustainability. But it is essential that we begin at once, guided by a plan that is effective, enforced and backed by science.

Only if Canada's climate legislation is amended and adhered to can we reduce our emissions fast enough to change the story. This transition will not only save our future, it will create jobs and strengthen our economy and our society. It is the only path to a viable future. It is a priority. It must be done and it can be done!

We look forward to the members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development demonstrating the courage and leadership that is so desperately needed to ensure that Canada and its people have a viable future.

Toronto350 is a member organization of 350.org. We are committed to ending the extraction and consumption of fossil fuels through collective non-partisan, grassroots action and non-violent civil disobedience in order to forge a zero-carbon future.

Our focus on climate justice, including a fair and beneficial transition for all, is central to this goal. We seek to motivate, educate and inspire the people of Toronto/Tkaronto to join the growing mass movement working to minimize the worst impacts of the climate crisis.