

BACKGROUND

January 29, 2007

Canada and the Future of Global Climate Policy The Importance of Canadian Action Now

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

The IPCC will release its Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) over the course of 2007. The first report, from Working Group 1, is being released later this week but copies have been leaked to the media and general public.ⁱ

The findings are not encouraging. Greenhouse gas emissions from human activity continue to rise, concentrations in the atmosphere are higher than any point in the last 650,000 years, and the last 12 years have produced 11 of the warmest years on record.

The AR4 confirms and strengthens what previous IPCC reports have stated and what the science has increasingly found since 2001 (the date of the IPCC's Third Assessment Report): climate change is happening, it is largely attributable to human activity, and serious impacts on humans and ecosystems are likely in the absence of action. Like previous reports, the certainty that it is happening due to human activity and the magnitude of projected impacts continue to increase.

The AR4 also has serious implications for Canada. The Arctic is warming "at almost twice the global average rate in the past 100 years," and the predicted rate that sea ice is expected to melt has increased since the Third Assessment Report. Permafrost temperatures and the area of melting permafrost are also increasing. For the more temperate regions of Canada, the AR4 predicts increased rate of summer drought, with the possibility of vegetation die-offs, more severe heat waves, and a decrease in snow cover during winter months.

The Need for Global Action

More than any other issue, climate change must be addressed globally and in a multilateral fashion. Greenhouse gas emissions anywhere contribute to climate change everywhere. The whole world needs to step forward collectively and take action "in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities."ⁱⁱ

It is not enough, in fact it is dishonourable, for Canada to say that Canadians emit only 2% of global GHG emissions and therefore what we do as a nation is irrelevant. Our per capita emissions level is one of the highest in the world as is our capacity to act. The developed world, including Canada, is responsible for creating climate change much more so than developing countries. Canada needs to show leadership, accept responsibility, and take action.

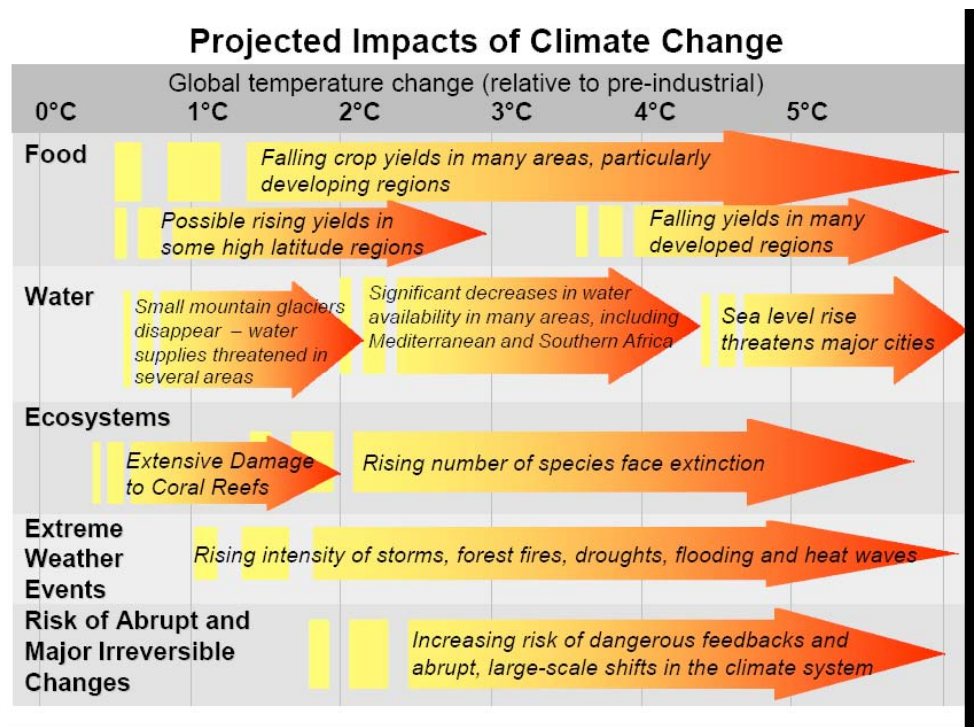
A Canadian Climate Change Plan

The Canadian government has spent much of January organizing a barrage of environmental announcements and photo-ops. Though the programs are welcome, the collective result of these programs and those announced in 2006 amounts to less than 10% of Canada's Kyoto commitment. We need to build on previous programs, not reinstate them at previous levels.

Instead of a piecemeal approach, Canada needs a comprehensive climate change plan. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, in her September 2006 report, stated that "a massive scale up of efforts is needed" on climate change and that the government needs "a believable, clear, and realistic plan to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions."ⁱⁱⁱ On May 16, 2006, Parliament voted in favour of a motion calling on the government to release a climate change plan by October 2006. The fact that the government has not released such a plan means that it is not only in contempt of Parliament but that it is not following through on the Commissioner's recommendations, despite the fact that it formally accepted them all.

Longer-term Emission Reductions

The science is clear that deep emission reductions are required in order to stabilize atmospheric concentrations of GHGs at levels that will avoid "dangerous" levels of climate change, widely accepted as 2°C of warming (see Figure below). In order to ensure that the world remains below this level of warming, developed countries will need to reduce emissions by at least 25-30% by 2020 and by 80% by 2050 in order to take our fair share of responsibility.^{iv} The Commissioner of the Environment also called on the government to "establish and commit to short- and long-term national goals" to reduce GHG emissions. It is therefore crucial that the special committee considering Bill C-30 establish these targets in legislation.



The Kyoto Protocol is more than targets. It establishes a global infrastructure for managing global warming and for ongoing multilateral negotiations within the United Nations. It includes obligations for all countries that ratified it, including China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Korea, as well as setting absolute targets for developed countries. It sets the framework for establishing a global carbon market. It is important for two additional reasons. First, it is international law and Canada is bound by the compliance requirements of the Protocol. Just as importantly, however, is that meeting our Kyoto reduction targets puts Canada on track to much deeper emission reductions in the future. Accepting that responsibility will also bring tremendous international support and goodwill, and leverage much greater emission reductions from other Parties. This is one way that Canada can once again “punch above its weight” on the international stage and the only way to protect Canadians from global warming and climate change

Global Leadership and International Negotiations

Global events are very important in framing Canada’s situation *vis à vis* action on climate change. Demonstrable progress reports from other Annex 1 countries show that, though additional measures are required in some cases, most Parties will be meeting their emission reduction target under the Kyoto Protocol. Those Parties on track to meeting their targets have undertaken strong regulatory, fiscal and emissions trading frameworks.

Since 2005 and for the next few years, 189 countries have been discussing what the future climate regime will look like after the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. Though overstated, there has been an impasse at these negotiations between Annex 1 (developed) countries that are urging the larger, richer developing nations to take on greater commitments after 2012 and those developing countries that claim that the developed world has failed to act decisively enough.

This impasse will be overcome when more and more nations step forward with strong commitments offered in good faith. We are seeing that already. The 25 member states of the European Union have committed to reduce its emissions to 20% below 1990 levels by 2020. The EU has also stated that it is willing to reduce to 30% below if other developed countries will step up and join them. Many jurisdictions—states, countries, and continents—are pledging even greater reductions for 2050 (see Table for list of commitments).

Canada needs to show the same leadership and it needs to begin preparing for real international negotiations that are likely to start in earnest next December and last for no more than two years so that obligations for future reductions come into force with no gap between commitment periods. For the entire developed world to accept the EU’s challenge will, more than anything, convince China, India, Brazil and other developing nations that we are serious about taking responsibility. Other recalcitrant nations, such as the United States and Australia, are also moving in that direction. The citizens of both countries are increasingly urging government action and their governments—national and sub-national—are reacting, albeit more slowly than many would like. Canada has the ability to further that momentum by joining the climate leaders.

Table: Selected post-2012 GHG emission reduction commitments by governments in industrialized countries (relative to 1990 levels except where noted).

	% reduction in emissions 1990–2020	% reduction in emissions 1990–2050
California	0 ^a	80
EU governments (25 countries)	15–30 ^b	60–80 ^c
European Commission	20–30 ^d	–
France	–	75–80 ^e
Germany	40 ^f	–
New England states/Eastern Canadian provinces	at least 10	75–85 ^g
UK	ca. 27–33 ^h	60 ^h

^a This does not imply zero effort but rather that emissions will be brought down after having risen.

^b Government leaders' recommendation for developed countries, rather than a commitment.

^c Environment ministers' recommendation for developed countries, rather than a commitment.

^d The Commission proposes 20% as a unilateral EU commitment, rising to 30% if other developed countries agree to the same.

^e Reduction below "current" level in 2004.

^f Offer conditional on the EU committing to a 30% reduction by same date.

^g Suggestion based on "current science"; reduction below "current" level in 2001; target for the "long term" (no precise date).

^h Reductions apply to CO₂ only.

Summary

For the Government of Canada to address climate change in a credible and comprehensive manner, it would need to:

- Develop and implement a plan to meet the Kyoto target,
- Set short, medium and long-term targets through the C-30 committee process,
- Develop a plan to meet post-2012 targets of at least 25% below 1990 levels by 2020,
- Engage in a meaningful way in the UN Kyoto process by pledging, in good faith, to these post 2012 targets in concert with the EU, and
- Undertake an economic assessment of the potential costs to Canada's economy and quality of life from the projected impacts of climate change.

ⁱ IPCC Working Group 1 Fourth Assessment Report, Final Draft (2006)

ⁱⁱ UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992).

ⁱⁱⁱ Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development (2006).

^{iv} See *The Case for Deep Reductions* (2005) by the David Suzuki Foundation and the Pembina Institute.