

TARNISHING THE MAPLE LEAF



**HOW THE TAR SANDS DRIVE CANADA'S
CLIMATE POSITIONS**

DECEMBER 2009

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This document was prepared on behalf of two networks of non-governmental organizations working on Tar Sands and climate change: the Tar Sands Group, and Climate Action Network Canada.

Supporters of this document include:



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The Tar Sands is Canada's fastest growing source of global warming pollution, and the reason for its poor performance in climate negotiations. CREDIT: S. JOCZ (this image appears on back cover as well)

Introduction

Canada once had an international reputation as a clean, green country with progressive environmental policies.

But when it comes to the positions and actions of the Government of Canada on global warming, today nothing could be further from the truth.

No other government has simply walked away from its Kyoto Protocol targets while embarking on a massive *increase* in global warming pollution – up more than 26 per cent since 1990 at a time when Canada was supposed to be reducing emissions by six per cent.¹

Furthermore, the Canadian government has emerged as an obstacle to international climate negotiations, ignoring science, challenging arguments around equity, and advocating for an end to the Kyoto Protocol.

The reason for the disconnect between Canada's positive historical reputation and its current poor performance is the Tar Sands, a massive deposit of thick hydrocarbons in northern Alberta that is now the site of an oil company frenzy.

The Tar Sands is the fastest growing source of global warming pollution in Canada. A direct line can be drawn between the desire of the Government of Canada to exploit the Tar Sands and the negative positions it takes during international climate negotiations.

The good news is that you can help. Canadians are sensitive to international opinion. At this juncture in human history when our civilization's life support systems are in question, it is critical that international voices call on Canada to once again play a leadership role. Canada must restore its reputation as a green country with progressive environmental policies.



“Canada is by far the biggest defaulter on its Kyoto obligations on a tonnage basis. And as a result of that there is a lack of trust.”

- Tim Flannery, author of *The Weathermakers*²



Getting oil out of the Tar Sands requires destroying the Boreal forest, peatlands, and wetlands.
PHOTO : PETER ESSICK



**“We will not be
the boy scouts
at the table.”**

— Canadian Environment Minister Jim Prentice
on international climate negotiations³

Canada's Role on the World Stage

Canada is the only country in the world to ratify a Kyoto Protocol target and then simply walk away from it. And now, Canada is also working to actively undermine progress towards an ambitious, equitable, and legally binding international climate treaty.

Rejecting Science

Canada refuses to take responsibility for the emissions reductions targets that science tells us are needed to avoid runaway global warming. Even though Canada agreed in Bali in 2007 that a post-2012 agreement must be based on IPCC analysis that industrialized countries cut their emissions 25-40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020,⁴ it has instead proposed a target for itself of 3 per cent below 1990 by 2020, missing the mark of the IPCC analysis by 22-37 per cent.⁵ It also repeatedly objected to using a science-based aggregate target in the negotiations leading up to Copenhagen.

At the recent G8 Summit in Italy, the Canadian government at first appeared to go along with the consensus of holding global warming under the critical two degree mark, which would mean a commitment by developed countries to reduce emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. Less than 24 hours later, however, Canada's Environment Minister said the commitment was "aspirational" and that Canada would not meet it.⁶

Shifting Blame

The Canadian government justifies its inaction by pointing fingers at others. On any given day, it cannot act because of the United States, or India, or China, or some combination.

In Bali, the Canadian government began to undermine the concept of 'differentiated responsibility' between the developed and developing countries by insisting that the developing countries take on absolute targets.⁷ This is still Canada's position today.

Turning the Page on Kyoto

At the recent climate talks in Bangkok, media reported that Canada's presentation on abandoning the Kyoto Protocol prompted a walk out by most of the G77 delegation.⁸ The Canadian Environment Minister has denied this happened, but he himself is on record saying we need to "move past Kyoto," and that a future climate agreement "will turn the page on Kyoto."⁹

Falling Short of its Fair Share

Canada has contributed just over \$240 million to climate financing for developing countries since 2000,¹⁰ far short of the estimated \$2-6 billion that would represent its fair share.¹¹ Furthermore, strings come attached. A briefing note from the Department of Foreign Affairs shows that Canada "seeks to leverage financial and technological assistance to extract binding emissions reduction commitments from the emerging economies."¹²

Changing the Measuring Stick

The Canadian government also wants to change the measuring stick for action on emissions reduction by pushing for a more recent baseline year. It has already used this approach at home to confuse the Canadian public. When the government came to power in 2006 it changed the baseline for measuring emissions growth from 1990 to 2006, which hides a massive growth in emissions from the Tar Sands since 1990, and is now attempting to foist this confusion onto the international community.¹³

Canada's Failing Record

The Bottom of the Class

Study after study ranks Canada last or almost last on reducing global warming pollution. The 2008 Climate Change Performance Index ranked Canada 56th out of 57 countries in terms of tackling emissions, ahead of only Saudi Arabia.¹⁴ The 2009 assessment of G8 countries by Allianz and WWF ranked Canada dead last.¹⁵

Canada is one of the worst countries in the world as measured by per capita emissions. Canadian per capita emissions are 22.8 tonnes of carbon dioxide, which is double that of citizens of the UK and Norway, six times higher than for citizens of China, and 14 times higher than citizens of India.¹⁶

Choosing to Delay

The current Canadian government likes to blame past governments for doing nothing on climate change, but four years after coming to power the government, under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, has yet to deliver a climate plan. The current government has introduced three proposals to limit emissions



“Kyoto is essentially a socialist scheme to suck money out of wealth-producing nations.”

– Stephen Harper

before he became Prime Minister of Canada¹⁷

from major polluters in Canada and failed to implement any of them.

The Canadian government is now saying it could be years before it clamps down on major polluters because it's waiting for the United States to act.¹⁸

Tar Sands Loopholes

When the Canadian government does get around to yet another proposal to regulate major polluters, it's likely to include loopholes for the Tar Sands as past proposals have. Because of the Tar Sands, Canada has pioneered the use of “intensity” targets that require a reduction in the emissions per unit of production (i.e. per barrel), while letting overall emissions rise. The Canadian government has yet to renounce the use of intensity targets for its oil sector.

Canada has also engineered other loopholes in past proposals, such as letting polluters pay

into a technology fund instead of making emissions reductions. The Canadian government has failed to renounce this too, even though it would put the country offside with the approach described in United States climate legislation and the EU's approach.

Independent Studies Contradict Canadian Government

In past climate proposals, these loopholes have meant that every independent analysis shows that the Canadian government would fail to meet even its weak targets. Canada's Parliamentary environmental watchdog said that Harper's climate plans "overstate the reductions" and are "not fully transparent."¹⁹ The Canadian National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy agreed that "it is likely that many of the emissions reductions attributed to specific measures and policies are overestimated."²⁰ Canadian climate academics Marc Jaccard and Nic Rivers estimated that the government would miss its 2020 targets by almost 200 million tonnes.²¹

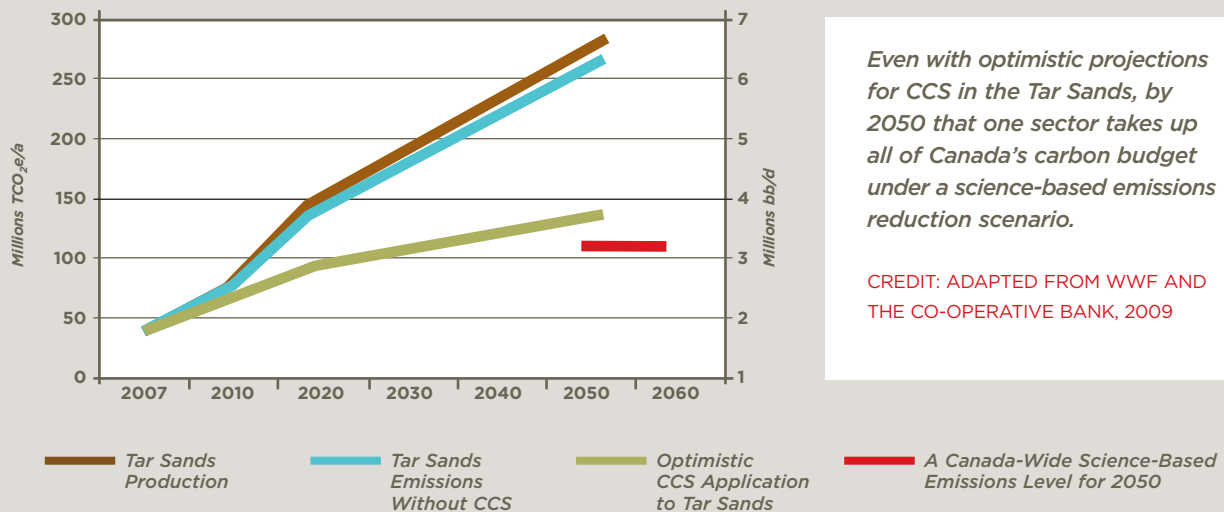
Canada's Dirty Oil

Less than 24 hours after United States President Obama's election victory, the first reaction of the Canadian government was to begin to pitch the United States on a North American approach to climate and energy, with the condition of 'protecting' the Tar Sands from emissions cuts.²² That this issue rose above all others is an indication of how important exploiting the Tar Sands is to the current Canadian government.

The Toxic Tar Sands

Underlying Northern Alberta and wrapped in sand, clay and mud is a massive deposit of thick hydrocarbons. In the 1990s the Alberta and Canadian governments embarked on a re-branding exercise to call this deposit the "oil sands," but the original name of "Tar Sands" more accurately describes the tarry substance found there, called "bitumen."

Tar Sands Emissions Growth Projected To Take Up All of Canada's Carbon Budget – Even With CCS





Tar Sands mining produces toxic tailings ponds now so big you can see them from space with the naked eye, all of which are leaking into the groundwater. PHOTO : GREENPEACE/EAMON MACMAHON



“One of the richest countries in the world [Canada] is blocking progress while we are already struggling with the devastating consequences of climate change.”

— Moussa Na Abau Mamouda
of ENDA Third World, Dakar, Senegal.²³

Getting at the bitumen involves either strip mining with the largest hydraulic shovels and trucks in the world, or else melting the bitumen out of the ground by injecting steam produced from burning huge quantities of natural gas and then pumping it out of the ground. The bitumen must then be processed to be turned into something more resembling crude oil, a process which also takes energy.

As a result, producing a barrel of Tar Sands oil releases on average three times the emissions as producing a barrel of regular oil.²⁴ In addition, Tar Sands extraction will destroy over a million and a half hectares of Boreal forest and peatlands, putting an extra 8.7 million tonnes of carbon into the air each year.²⁵ It also uses massive amounts of fresh water, much of which ends up in huge toxic tailings ponds now so big you can see them from space with the naked eye, all of which are leaking into the groundwater.²⁶

The Carbon Capture Myth

Canada has tried to placate concerns about the rising emissions from the Tar Sands by pointing to Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) as the magic solution. However, in a devastating report on the application of Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) to the Tar Sands, WWF and the Co-operative Bank showed that even the most optimistic estimates of this unproven technology would fail to reduce upstream emissions to the levels of conventional oil production. Even with CCS, Tar Sands production would use up *all* of Canada's 2050 carbon budget under a science-based reduction scenario.²⁷

No Energy Security Without Climate Security

Given its failure to address the environmental impacts of the Tar Sands, the Canadian government wants people to ignore those failures



“This particular government (Canada) has been a government of skeptics. They do not want to do anything on climate change.”

- Rajendar Pachauri,
Chairman of the IPCC²⁸

in the name of “energy security.” The Canadian government, nervous that its number one customer for dirty oil is moving on global warming, has dispatched its officials throughout the United States to promote Canada as a more stable, secure and friendly supplier of oil to the United States than other countries.²⁹ The implication of this sales pitch is that the American government should ignore the disaster unfolding in Northern Alberta and keep buying Canada's dirty oil.

There is, however, no such thing as “energy security” without climate security, for global civilization will be in chaos if we fail to limit the impacts of global warming. James Hansen, Director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, says this: “The horrendously carbon-intensive unconventional fossil fuels, tar shale in the United States and Tar Sands in Canada, cannot be developed. The carbon emissions from tar shale and Tar Sands

would initiate a continual unfolding of climate disasters over the course of this century.”³⁰

Redeeming Canada

Regular Canadians Support Action

The people of Canada are consistently ahead of their politicians in their desire to tackle global warming. A recent public opinion poll found that Canadians, by a two to one margin, agreed that developed countries like Canada have a responsibility to set “higher and harder targets” for emissions reductions than developing countries, yet the Canadian government has taken the opposite position. A majority also thought that Canada’s approach to global warming isn’t ambitious or aggressive enough.³¹ The government in Ottawa does not represent the views of Canadians on global warming.

Some of the provinces in the Canadian federal system are also trying to fill the leadership vacuum left behind by the national government in Ottawa. Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Manitoba have joined the Western Climate Initiative, a regional cap and trade initiative.³² But, without strong action by the federal government, Tar Sands emissions growth will wipe out the efforts of provinces over time.

You Can Help

Canadians are very sensitive to international opinion. Once, Canada sought to play a leadership role in the world, with its future Prime Minister earning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957, and its military fulfilling peacekeeping functions around the world in decades following. Canadians care about the world.



“Canada criticizes other countries about their human rights policies or about the death penalty while they are playing with the lives of island people and the Inuit.”

- Enele Sopoaga

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Tuvalu to the United Nations and vice-chair of the Alliance of Small Island States³³

At this juncture in human history when our civilization’s life support systems are in question, it is critical that international voices call on Canada to once again play a leadership role. Dirty oil production cannot be allowed to define a people who desire to be part of the solution. Canada must restore its reputation as a green country with progressive environmental laws. Other countries can help it get there if they speak out.

Endnotes

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