

Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians

A collection of texts in response to
*Acting on Climate Change:
Solutions from Canadian Scholars*,
a consensus document released in March 2015



Aknowledgements

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Preface

Sustainable Canada Dialogues has mobilized over 60 Canadian scholars from every province, representing climate change expertise in areas from engineering to sociology, to elaborate a scholarly consensus on science-based, viable solutions for greenhouse gas reduction. This resulted in a position paper, *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars*, launched in March 2015, presenting 10 key policy orientations that could be adopted to kick-start Canada's transition toward a low-carbon society.

We, the scholars, are motivated by a shared view that putting options on the table will stimulate action and is long overdue in Canada. Acknowledging that the policies and actions proposed by the scholars are limited to the authors' fields of expertise, we circulated our position paper to a spectrum of business associations, First Nations, non-governmental organizations, labour groups, institutions, organizations and private citizens, to expand the discussion. The collection of texts, *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians*, presents contributions stemming from these interactions. We invited some contributions, while others were offered to us. Sustainable Canada Dialogues and its partners did not lead or endorse the contributions, associated pictures or artwork; content belongs to the respective authors and organizations.

Together, the contributions enrich the scope of possible solutions and show that Canada is brimming with ideas, possibilities and the will to act. With 29 contributions, *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians* is not a countrywide consultation. Some key voices are missing. We did not have the resources to engage all sectors of society. However, we do affirm that Canada needs a collective vision of desired pathways to our futures and that such consultation is necessary. As stated in *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars*: "We wish for an intense period of consultation and policy development to identify the policy instruments, regulations and incentives best suited to Canada." This is the challenge we place before decision-makers.

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Foreword

As I sit down to write the foreword to this collection of texts, *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians*, I reflect on the path we have traveled in one year. It was a challenge for us to prepare a climate action plan that could be endorsed by more than 60 scholars of various ages, provinces and disciplines. The idea behind the effort was that we, as scholars, represent a microcosm of society and our common position could perhaps become a rallying point around a way forward.

It seems to me that we have won our bet as actors of different political stripes have given our report rave reviews. However, it was the many messages we received that were the most pleasant surprise. When we released our consensus paper, *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* in March 2015, I anticipated receiving some negative responses from climate-sceptics. To my astonishment, this was not at all the case. In fact, I received many thank-you emails. These messages all shared the same core idea: "Thank you for giving us *hope*."

This recognition has given me great pleasure, because we deliberately positioned our paper from a positive point-of-view. When Sophie Langlois, a Radio-Canada journalist, went to Africa to cover the Ebola outbreak, she said, "the feeling of helplessness leads to inaction." Discussions among Sustainable Canada Dialogues scholars led us to the same conclusion. People feel overwhelmed by the problem of climate change, and for good reason. It's terrifying to hear about a visibly melting Arctic, hurricanes, droughts, floods and how these will affect all humans now and in the future. We thus chose to place Sustainable Canada Dialogues in the field of *The Possible*. Rather than placing blame for past mistakes, our aim is to be inclusive in finding solutions for a future of which we can all be proud.

In *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars*, we acknowledged that no solution would be ideal or immediate. Rather, we will need to engage as a society in a period of transition between the way things are done today and the way Canadians want to see things done in the future. In making the transition to a low-carbon society, we open an opportunity for changes that can improve our quality of life. This is where hope lies, and it is one of the themes that emerges from *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians*.

As we speak, Ontario is giving all Canadians a great lesson by transitioning away from coal-generated electricity, showing it is possible to change for the best. In Quebec, we still recall our great energy transition: the nationalization of electricity and development of large dams. Apparently when this work of giants began, existing technology did not allow electricity to be transported over long distances. Yet the dams were built, as were the high-voltage lines. Now all this seems obvious. Both volumes of *Acting on Climate Change* therefore seek to instill that confidence – the confidence in our ability to change, and in our innovative power – so the people of Canada can rediscover the desire to work together on a future that is both better and possible.

I would now like to take you, in this foreword, to a field I know well—the rainforest, where I have worked for over 20 years. In most tropical countries, deforestation is both an important economic engine as well as the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. This was certainly the case in Brazil, when in 2009 then-President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva pledged to reduce deforestation in the Amazon by 80% by 2020. When he made the announcement, the deforestation rate was 12 980 km² per year¹. Six years later in 2014, deforestation had decreased to 4 848 km² per year – a 62% reduction. Brazil's efforts, which successfully addressed its worst environmental problem head-on, were instrumental in my motivation to undertake the adventure that is Sustainable Canada Dialogues.

The question floating in the back of my mind was, “What makes Brazil do it better than Canada?” I spoke to my Brazilian colleagues about it. According to them, it took mobilization of the entire country to solve the problem. It took an alliance and collaboration between non-governmental organizations, researchers, the business sector and various levels of government. I had indeed witnessed this approach at the climate change conference in Copenhagen in 2009, when a representative of Greenpeace-Brazil was included in the national delegation, and sat next to the Brazilian government representatives during negotiations on deforestation.

Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians seeks to help build a foundation for such alliances among different sectors of society. Our call for input from civil society was not made randomly. On the one hand, we sought to address gaps in *Solutions from Canadian Scholars* that we had ourselves observed, specifically in the areas of investment, economics and employment. On the other hand, we sought answers to comments made after the position paper's release. For example, the scholars' proposal to make full use of hydroelectric resources was one that raised concerns. We received messages from Labrador and British Columbia that emphasized the environmental and social disruption that can be caused by dams. Therefore this subject is developed further in the present collection.

During the March 2015 launch of *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars*, we met with representatives of the four levels of government that should drive the transition to a low-carbon society, namely: Indigenous Peoples, and federal, provincial and municipal governments. Some examples of sustainable hydropower projects were highlighted in the discussions, like that of the Mashteuiatsh community in Quebec, which develops low-power hydroelectricity with surrounding communities. There is now cooperation between Indigenous

1 Official rate in 2008, http://www.obt.inpe.br/prodes/prodes_1988_2014.htm, accessed on July 17th, 2015

and non-Indigenous partners working together on development². The financial return on the sale of electricity is shared between these partners. Similarly, in Manitoba the government is now working with Indigenous Nations that have become partners in hydroelectricity generation³. Thus, we have good Canadian examples to draw upon as we collectively plan the route to our desired future. They share a common element: each was developed with full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and implemented with free, prior and informed consent of representative Indigenous institutions. I am pleased that *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians* brings an additional perspective on the Nation-to-Nation collaboration with Indigenous Peoples that will allow Canada to use its huge renewable energy potential in the best possible way.

We were questioned about the omission of direct reference to Alberta and the oil sands in *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars*. Scientific evidence indicates that fossil fuel extraction will need to cease in the medium term to keep the increase in global temperature around 2°C⁴. Governments of several provinces are challenged by this issue – provinces and territories through whose lands pipelines could pass; and those, like Quebec, that are considering development of unconventional fossil fuels such as shale oil and gas. This is why, in our position paper, the authors decided not to treat the oil sands as a special case.

Our third key policy orientation, **Integrate the oil and gas production sector in climate policies**, calls for a change in the parameters of environmental impact studies for any project related to transport, oil exploration or fossil fuel exploitation to include full accounting for the impact on climate, the costs of inaction and the need to decarbonize our economy and society. The existing piecemeal approach allows for continuous growth of an industry that should profoundly modify its operations. Several contributions to the present collection of texts address the issue of fossil fuel extraction, adding valuable input to the discussion. I hope readers will discover, as I did, new visions of how this can be achieved.

There is an important aspect of climate change, however, that *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogues Among Canadians* does not confront, and that is the issue of global responsibility. In 2009, when I was negotiating for the Framework Convention on Climate Change, I attended a technical briefing on the issue of historical responsibility organized for negotiators preparing the Copenhagen Climate Summit⁵. A communication⁶ given by Henry Shue, Senior Research Fellow at Oxford University, really struck me. He explained how if a person or state causes harm without knowing, it is not good but it is excusable. By contrast, if a person or state causes harm while being aware of the consequences of the action, it becomes morally unacceptable.

If I rely on this analysis, I conclude the current moral position of Canada is unacceptable. The federal government has adopted an emissions reduction target, but, as noted in this collection

2 <http://www.energievertelsj.ca/fr/1/Accueil/>, accessed on July 17th, 2015

3 <http://www.gov.mb.ca/ana/interest/agreements.html#2>, accessed on July 17th, 2015

4 <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v517/n7533/full/nature14016.html>, accessed on July 17th, 2015

5 <http://unfccc.int/bodies/awg-lca/items/4891.php>, accessed on July 23rd, 2015

6 http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/ad_hoc_working_groups/lca/application/pdf/1_shue_rev.pdf, accessed on July 23rd, 2015

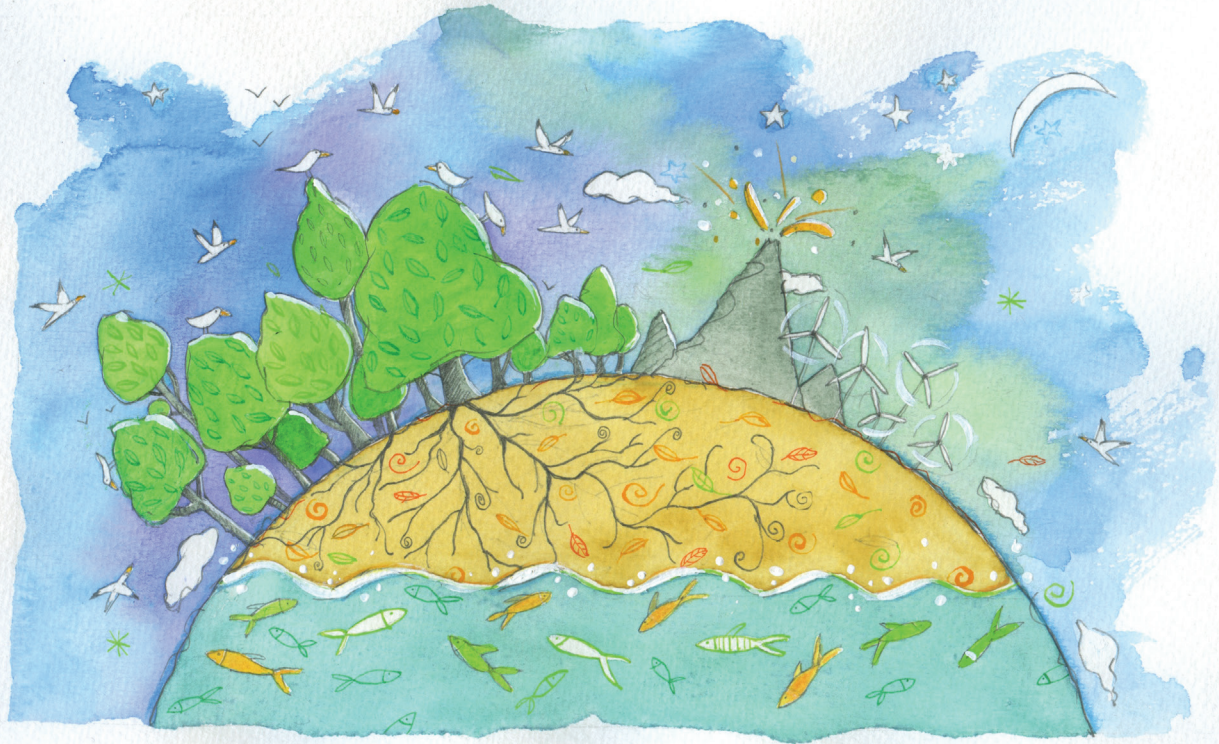
of texts, the target is not accompanied by an action plan to enable its achievement. I have invented a little charade to illustrate the shadow games that can obscure an acceptable moral position for Canada. According to the EDGAR database⁷, Canada's emissions in 2013 accounted for 1.56% of global emissions. That implies to some of our leaders that our responsibility is minimal, or even insignificant. However, EDGAR also shows that Canada is the ninth largest emitter of greenhouse gases out of 213 countries in the world⁸. Do you think this changes anything when we consider our responsibility? Let us now consider per capita emissions. According to EDGAR, Canadians have the third highest rate of emissions per capita out of all developed countries after Australia and the United States, with 15.6 tons of CO₂ per capita per year. At what point does it therefore become our global responsibility?

The year 2015 is an important year for those who, like us, believe it is time to act to address climate change. It is crucial to elect a federal government that has a climate action target with a coherent plan to achieve it. This collection of texts enriches the solutions offered by the scholars of Sustainable Canada Dialogues. I hope it helps citizens make clear demands on their governments and believe in the future. It is for this reason that *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians* concludes with the voices of youth.

Catherine Potvin, Panama, July 23rd 2015

7 EDGAR is a collaboration between the European Commission and the Government of the Netherlands.

8 edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/overview.php?v=CO2ts1990-2013, accessed on July 17th, 2015



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