

How do B.C.'s climate action commitments stack up?

Rising emissions in B.C. contrast with progress in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec

by Josha MacNab and Maximilian Kniewasser | June 14, 2016

Summary

A look at Canada's four most populous provinces shows that B.C. is lagging behind on commitments to new climate action. Alberta, Ontario and Quebec are all projected to see decreases in carbon pollution by 2030 based on the actions they've taken or committed to. Conversely, B.C. is projected to see a 39 per cent increase in emissions by 2030. Meanwhile, the province is sure to miss its legislated emissions reduction target for 2020. However, the Climate Leadership Team's recommendations would see B.C. get back on track to meeting its 2050 emissions target.

The government of British Columbia is poised to announce the first update to its climate plan since 2008. Due to a lack of climate action, carbon pollution in B.C. is rising too quickly for the province to meet its legislated emissions target for 2020. To get B.C. back on track, the new Climate Leadership Plan will need to set a clear path to achieving the province's 2050 target and position the economy to thrive in a low-carbon world.

B.C. has a history of successful climate action. Under the first Climate Action Plan in 2008, a package of policies and programs were implemented that worked together to see B.C.'s emissions go down. These effective policies included:

1. **Carbon tax:** Introduced at \$10 per tonne and increased annually by \$5 per tonne until 2012, the carbon tax contributed to a strong B.C. economy and helped to create the conditions for the emissions reductions B.C. saw over this period.¹

¹ Brian C. Murray and Nicholas Rivers, British Columbia's Revenue-Neutral Carbon Tax: A Review of the Latest "Grand Experiment" in *Environmental Policy*, Working Paper NI WP 15-04 (2015).
https://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/sites/default/files/publications/ni_wp_15-04_full.pdf

2. **Clean energy requirements:** The Clean Energy Act kept the electricity supply low in carbon, and the ban on coal-fired electricity generation avoided 1.7 megatonnes (Mt) of emissions from two proposed coal plants.²
3. **Low carbon fuel standard:** Targeting a 10 per cent reduction in intensity of carbon pollution from motor fuel by 2020, the low carbon fuel standard resulted in the avoidance of 0.9 Mt of emissions in 2012.³

However, since the introduction of the 2008 plan, climate action has stalled in B.C. In addition to being slow to implement new policies and programs designed to reduce B.C.'s emissions, the government has kept the carbon tax — its most effective tool for the job — frozen since 2012.

As a result of inaction, B.C.'s carbon pollution is increasing. Between 2011 and 2014, it climbed by 1.8 Mt of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) — akin to adding 380,000 cars to our roads.⁴ This trend is projected to continue in the absence of new climate action. Government forecasts suggest B.C.'s emissions will grow to 83 Mt, or 32 per cent above the 2014 level, by 2030.⁵

This increase in emissions is largely due to a projected increase in oil and gas development, including liquefied natural gas (LNG). Over 80 per cent of the emissions increase between 2014 and 2030 is projected to come from this sector. The remaining projected increase comes primarily from emissions-intensive and trade-exposed industries and the building sector.⁶ A strong Climate Leadership Plan would decrease all of these projections.

A recent report by the Canadian Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project Team modelled the projected changes in emissions from all Canadian provinces and territories based on their committed actions to date. A look at Canada's four most populous provinces shows that B.C. is lagging behind on commitments to new climate action. Figure 1 shows the change in emissions projected in each province by 2030 as a percentage of their total emissions in 2014. Alberta, Ontario and Quebec are all projected to see decreases in emissions of 26, 22 and 23 per cent,

² Joshua MacNab, "LNG Act makes B.C.'s climate goals harder to achieve" (Pembina Institute, 2015). <http://www.pembina.org/blog/lng-act-makes-bcs-climate-goals-harder-to-achieve>

³ Ministry of Energy and Mines, "Renewable and Low Carbon Fuel Requirements Regulation: Summary for 2012," Information Bulletin RLCF-007-2012 (July 2014). http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/electricity-alternative-energy/transportation/renewable-low-carbon-fuels/rlcf-007-2012_summary.pdf

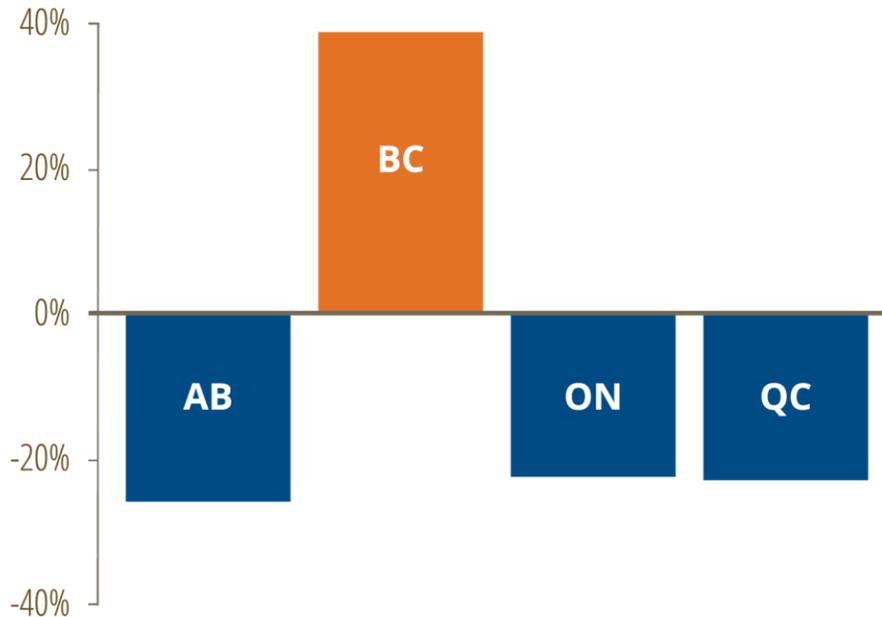
⁴ Environment and Climate Change Canada, *Canada's Greenhouse Gas Inventory*. <http://www.ec.gc.ca/ges-ghg/default.asp?lang=En&n=83A34A7A-1>

⁵ Adapted from Environment and Climate Change Canada, *Canada's Second Biennial Report on Climate Change* (2016). <http://www.ec.gc.ca/GES-GHG/default.asp?lang=En&n=02D095CB-1>

⁶ Adapted from *Canada's Second Biennial Report on Climate Change*.

respectively, by 2030 based on the actions they've taken or committed to. Conversely, B.C. is projected to see a 39 per cent⁷ increase in emissions by 2030.⁸

Figure 1: Change in emissions by 2030 for Canada's most populous provinces



Forecasts based on provinces' committed actions to date and 2014 baseline.

Data source: Adapted from Canadian Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project Team

Fortunately, B.C. has a near term opportunity to change its emissions trajectory. The [B.C. Climate Leadership Team recommendations](#) represent a collection of actions and policy changes that would see B.C. get back on track to meeting its 2050 emissions reduction target. The 32 recommendations include:

- **Buildings:** Reduce emissions from buildings by 50 per cent by 2030.
- **Transportation:** Set a 2030 target for the low carbon fuel standard and establish a new zero emission vehicle standard.

⁷ The Canadian Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project Team's modelling shows a slightly higher projection for B.C.'s emissions in 2030 than the federal government's modelling due to different assumptions. Notably, the DDPP team modeled lower oil prices, which drive carbon pollution from end-use higher due to insufficient price signals on emissions. This is further exacerbated by the decrease of B.C.'s carbon tax in real terms over the study period.

⁸ Actions modelled in this analysis include Ontario cap and trade, Alberta Climate Leadership Plan, B.C.'s current carbon tax and Quebec cap and trade. For more details on the specific policies included, see Dave Sawyer and Chris Bataille, *Still Minding the Gap: An Assessment of Canada's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Obligations* (Canadian Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project Team, 2016). <http://climateactionnetwork.ca/2016/04/26/still-minding-the-gap/>

- **Methane:** Cut methane emissions from the natural gas sector by 40 per cent over the next five years.
- **Carbon tax:** Unfreeze the carbon tax and begin increases of \$10 per tonne per year while protecting affordability for British Columbians and mitigating competitiveness impacts.
- **Target:** Set a new emissions target of 40 per cent below 2007 levels by 2030.

However, anything less than the full package of recommendations, including an increasing carbon tax, will mean B.C. will miss its 2050 target.

B.C. gained its reputation as a climate leader with the introduction of the 2008 Climate Action Plan and carbon tax. But B.C.'s inaction on climate and freeze of the carbon tax since 2012 has lost the province its leadership position.

While Alberta's, Ontario's and Quebec's plans are all projected to bring down emissions, B.C.'s are projected to increase. Adopting the Climate Leadership Team recommendations would help put B.C. back on track.