

Bill C-377, An Act to ensure Canada assumes its responsibilities in preventing dangerous climate change

Presentation by Matthew Bramley to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, December 11, 2007

Good afternoon and thank you for having me again.

I'd like to start by congratulating Mr Layton for his leadership and vision in introducing this bill. To my knowledge it is the first attempt to ensure that Canada is legally required to do its fair share towards the prevention of dangerous climate change — the ultimate objective of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which has been ratified by almost every country in the world.

A little over two years ago, the Pembina Institute and the David Suzuki Foundation decided that we needed to understand the greenhouse gas emission reductions that Canada would have to achieve to play a full part in meeting the UN Framework Convention's objective. The result was our report entitled *The Case for Deep Reductions*, of which you should have copies.

Our analysis in that report followed a logical sequence of questions:

1. Based on scientists' projections of global impacts, how much warming would be dangerous?
2. To avert that amount of warming, at what level would atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases need to be stabilized?
3. To stabilize *concentrations* at that level, by how much would global *emissions* need to be reduced?
4. To reduce *global* emissions by that amount, by how much would *industrialized countries'* emissions need to be cut?

To address the first of these questions, it was already widely accepted two years ago that to have sufficient confidence of avoiding catastrophic impacts, the world must strive to keep average global warming within two degrees Celsius, relative to the pre-industrial level. Today, support for a two degrees global warming limit is significantly broader. According to the recent Bali Climate Declaration by Scientists, the two degrees limit must be "the prime goal" of the next global climate treaty. This declaration is signed by distinguished Canadian climate scientists including Corinne Le Quéré, Richard Peltier and Andrew Weaver.

I don't have time to take you through each stage of the analysis in *The Case for Deep Reductions*, but our final conclusion was that Canada needs to cut its greenhouse gas pollution by 25% below the 1990 level by 2020, and by 80% below the 1990 level by 2050. These are the same targets that Mr Layton has included in Bill C-377.

This year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirmed that these targets are in line with science. The IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report showed that to have a reasonable chance of avoiding two degrees of global warming, industrialized countries need to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 25–40% below the 1990 level by 2020, and by 80–95% below the 1990 level by 2050.

These numbers are shown in Table 1 of the UN Technical Paper (code number FCCC/TP/2007/1), of which you should also have copies. Please note that the targets in Bill C-377 are at the low end of the IPCC's ranges; in other words, they are conservative.

Can Canada reduce its emissions by 80% below the 1990 level by 2050? Achieving that target while maintaining normal levels of economic activity implies moving to a nearly emissions-free energy system. There is every reason to believe that this is achievable, if Canada implements strong policies that encourage maximum use of low-impact renewable energy, complemented where necessary and appropriate by higher-risk technologies such as carbon capture and storage.

The Case for Deep Reductions outlines a range of evidence why deep emission cuts by 2050 are feasible from the perspectives of technology, cost and competitiveness. Table 1 of the UN Technical Paper, citing the IPCC, shows that in the scenarios compatible with limiting global warming to two degrees, global GDP could be up to 5.5% smaller in 2050 than in a scenario in which emissions are not controlled. In other words, about two years of GDP growth might be lost in half a century. That's a small effect, and one that could disappear altogether as a result of technology innovation.

In any case, I do not believe that the targets in this bill can be justifiably weakened on the basis of anticipated financial costs of making emission reductions. The expected global costs of climate impacts beyond two degrees warming — costs for people, economies and ecosystems — are simply too great. I would suggest that a country with natural, financial and intellectual resources as abundant as Canada's must simply decide that this is a task that must be achieved, and get to work.

Do we need to set these targets in law, and require that measures are taken to achieve them? Yes, because there have been, and continue to be, too many examples of federal governments adopting greenhouse gas targets and then not doing what is necessary to meet them. Canada would not be alone with the approach proposed by Bill C-377, as it is quite similar to that of the UK government's recently published Climate Change Bill.

Some might say that Canada should not take on the science-based targets in Bill C-377 until all other major emitting countries do. I would answer that that is not a responsible attitude, for two reasons. First, Canadians want to show leadership and ambition in solving this problem; the government has also expressed its desire to be a leader on this issue. Second, we have the resources to do this. Countries like France, Germany, Norway and the UK have already adopted targets similar to those in this bill because it's the right thing to do, and because they believe they can achieve them.

Others might argue that Canada has special circumstances that should result in us taking on less stringent targets. I suggest that they should specify which countries should have to do more, to compensate for Canada for doing less. I would also remind you that the targets in this bill are already at the lower limit of what the IPCC says industrialized countries must achieve for the world to have a chance of avoiding two degrees of global warming.

This is not a political bill. It's a bill that's about basing policy on science, and ensuring that Canada does not transfer our responsibilities to other countries. I see no reason why it should not be supported by all parties.