

## S5-3 A Critique of Evident Behaviour

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While it is difficult to assess the behaviour of the average Canadian toward the issue of Climate Change, one can enlist various means to define that behaviour. Four such means include:

- Media – What is the pulse of Canadian media?
- Polls – What do we say about ourselves?
- Political action – What do we see our leaders do? What does that say about us?
- Action – What does the evidence indicate?

### Media

In a review of the media, one sees a range of responses to CC, probably reflective of the range of responses among the population. It is not always easy to determine if the population is swayed by the media or if the media responds to the input of the reading / listening / viewing public. Good (2008) sees a correlation between newspaper articles and poll results, and suggests causation but this is not substantiated.

In any case, media personnel seem to be quite sure of their stance and each considers their view supported by “good science and economics”. Good (2008) does see a shift from “controversy over” to “evidence for” CC but few media articles (less than 5%) offer solutions to the current “GHG crisis” and thus provide no further aid to the average citizen.

According to Good (2008), Canadian newspapers report on CC at a rate of 2 times what is seen in international papers, 3 times what occurs in US papers, indicating that the issue is one of considerable interest to Canadians.

### Polls

The polls suggest that Canadians are concerned about CC and see the need for society to do something about it, including “strong action”. Most of the polls ask straight forward questions regarding the desirability of acting, perhaps in relation to other priorities such as health care, education and the state of the economy, such that one would be surprised if mainstream Canadians came out opposed to action

on CC. However, such surveys are sometimes seen as asking “motherhood and apple pie” questions where the logical answer would always be affirmative and thus does not necessarily indicate the degree to which the citizenry actually is passionate about addressing climate change issues. More interesting is the variability in the responses over time – recent poles indicate economic and employment issues have taken over as priorities – and questions related to costs of addressing climate change.

Historically polls have seen Canadians at 70% to 80% in favour of some action and have, in some years, seen Climate Change as one of the top issues to be addressed by governments but a 2007 poll indicated that relatively few Canadians would spend extra time (37%) or extra money (20%) to do something about it (O’Neil 2008). A McAllister poll in 2008 showed that 83% of Canadians should commit to STRONG ACTION and 78% said they would be willing to spend money on it. A 2009 Ipsos Reid poll found that, yes, strong action was required but 45% of them thought that we should first wait out the recession. In this same poll, 85% thought they were doing their fair share and 70% thought they were doing more than most. 66% would pay more for EE (and GHG reductions) but 45% of them said it would have been less that what they’d have done a year ago.

### Political Action

All political leaders have gotten on the “we are doing very well” band wagon and, while the results (see next) don’t indicate this, all of them proclaim good progress, although they don’t state clearly where (perceived political activity maybe?). It is unlikely that most of the regions they represent will reach their proclaimed targets.

Federally, we have seen a multitude of plans and few GHG reduction results (perhaps, in part, because implementation was not complete or long lasting). The current plan, while proposed some years ago, is still not fully enacted and is again undergoing scrutiny.

Provincially, we have a wide variety of plans from

“little” to “graduated tax” regimes. There are a number of jurisdictional issues as to who has governance and authority over what (federal vs. provincial). There are a number of “scorecards” available from different NGOs (e.g., see WWF – G8 scorecard report for 2009).

Regional or local (municipal) governments have become much involved but shown relatively little progress up to this time since they are working in a non-harmonized political regime and have limited (usually volunteer focussed) policy options, constrained funds and jurisdiction only in certain areas. Given that they cannot often go it alone, many of their approaches would be deemed economically irrational (i.e., they can't afford the big things and depend on voluntary activities and participation, see Ajay Sharma, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

### Action

The data show that “Canadians are in favour of Climate Change” in that they, in spite of their understanding of themselves and their “activity” (see Polls above), continue to consume, apparently quite unabated, increasing amounts of fossil fuels. Canada's emissions are up over 26% since 1990 and they are 32% shy of and will not make Canada's Kyoto target. Often manufacturing industry is blamed but the manufacturing sector is actually down 10%, including process emissions, in 2007 from 1990. They would have, in fact, met a “Kyoto target” had they had one. This does not include upstream Oil & Gas (i.e., oil sands, natural gas extraction).

The most significant emissions changes are from transportation, primarily in the switch to light trucks (where the definition of a light truck has been “ratcheted” downward to include what are ostensibly cars) and in transportation of goods by heavy duty diesel trucks. In effect, activities such as “just-in-time” delivery and door-to-door service that limits or eliminates transfers of cargo have meant that companies have actually shifted their storage facilities and warehouses to the country's highways. Both of these transportation increases exceed, in total tonnage, the emissions tonnage increase due to Oil Sands activities.<sup>2</sup>

While emissions associated with residences is up only marginally (2.5%, i.e., residential intensity has declined), commercial demand for energy has made their emissions increase by 37%, greater than the overall Canadian average. Since these activities can be typically associated with individual activity (as opposed to supply side or industrial activity), the data suggest that, while polled as being sensitive to and even aggressively responsive to the Climate Change issue, the average Canadian's actions belie their words.

### Conclusion

Unless confronted with pricing and/or other compulsory policies, the Canadian response to CC issues will likely remain one that says that, while they are in favour of something being done, they themselves have done what they could and will not change much more in terms of their response, especially given the current difficult economic situation. While there is a role for the various policy tools available to policy and decision makers, their impact on addressing the issue of climate change and reducing GHG emissions remains mediocre at best and insignificant at worst. Current initiatives will not change the average Canadian's behaviour with respect to these issues and, except for those who generated the policies and programs designed to address these issues, few would be so bold as to suggest we would attain stated targets (never mind more international, more rigorous targets suggested in the literature).

### Citation

Good, Jennifer. 2008. "Climate Status Quo? The Newspaper Framing of Climate Change in Canada, the United States and Around the World" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 94th Annual Convention, TBA, San Diego, CA, Nov 20, 2008*

Lee, Peter. 2009. *New Study Reveals Substantial Unreported Quantities Of Greenhouse Gas Emissions From The Oil Sands In The Boreal Forests Of Alberta Canada* [www.globalforestwatch.ca/docs/media-release-biocarbon\\_20090927.pdf](http://www.globalforestwatch.ca/docs/media-release-biocarbon_20090927.pdf), accessed Oct 2, 2009

<sup>1</sup> There are currently a number of activities that suggest that this is not completely true (e.g., the recent QUEST program, [www.questcanada.org](http://www.questcanada.org)) but some barriers regarding ability to respond exist.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, data indicate that the increases may actually exceed total tonnage from Oil Sands, not just the change in total tonnage. However, recent reviews (e.g., Global Forest Watch, Peter Lee, 2009) have suggested that Oil Sands emissions are significantly underestimated (25%) because none have taken into account the impact of regional forest and peatland devastation.

O'Neil, Peter. 2008. "Efforts to support global climate change falls: Poll". European Correspondent for CanWest News, November 27, 2008

Sharma, Ajay. 2009. "The Municipal Climate change Response in North America: Negotiating the Logic

of Collective Action". Paper presented at the 67<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago Illinois, April 2-5, 2009, draft copy.