

FACTSHEET: Bill C-311, the Climate Change Accountability Act

Background:

Bill C-311, the *Climate Change Accountability Act*, would set a national, **science-based emission reduction target** that represents Canada's fair share of the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution. The target is to reduce Canada's emissions to 80% below the 1990 level by 2050, which is identical to President Obama's 2050 target, while G8 leaders as a group committed to a similar target at the 2009 G8 Summit. Thus, a decision by Canada's Parliament to adopt these targets would send a strong signal to the world that Canada intends to do its part in tackling global warming and protecting the most vulnerable people from its devastating consequences. The bill alone is not the whole answer for Canada's climate policy. And while strong targets for industrialized countries are an essential ingredient for a successful outcome within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, so too is financial support from developed countries for tackling climate change in developing countries, an issue that is not included in this private member's bill.

This bill would set national greenhouse gas emission targets for Canada that align with scientific assessments of the emission reductions needed to have a chance of avoiding dangerous climate change. The bill would also require the federal government to take the necessary steps to ensure the targets are met.

Under Bill C-311 the Minister of the Environment would establish a **credible pathway** to achieve the 2050 goal, by setting national emission targets for five-year intervals from 2015 to 2045. Until this target plan is established, Canada's 2020 target would be to reduce national emissions to 25% below the 1990 level. The Minister of the Environment would be required to publish this pathway, along with the scientific, economic and technical assessments used to establish each target. The trajectory would be subject to a review at least every five years, giving Canada the **flexibility** to adjust its emissions pathway in light of new developments.

Bill C-311 would require the government to plan emission-reduction policies well into the future and lay them out clearly every year. This **longer-term approach** is critical to ensuring that Canada has federal policies that get us on track to where we need to be. It would also provide industry with the regulatory certainty it needs to plan major investments.

Bill C-311 would create an **obligation** for the government to adopt regulations to ensure Canada meets its emissions targets, taking into account federal spending programs and provincial action. The bill would also oblige the government to ensure that its positions in international negotiations align with those targets.

Bill C-311 would extend and strengthen important **accountability mechanisms**, by requiring regular reviews of the government's plans and their implementation by the National Round Table on the Environment and Economy and the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

Voting Bill C-311 into law would send a powerful statement of renewed climate **leadership** to the world, demonstrating that Canada is prepared to play a responsible part in the global climate fight. This leadership is critical to engaging other major emitters and building the trust necessary to forget a strong global deal.

Economic analysis produced by M.K Jaccard and Associates, a leading modeling firm that has provided advice to the Government of Canada and to several provincial governments, shows that Canada could reach a science-based national GHG target by 2020 while growing the economy by well over 20% and adding nearly two million net new jobs. (For further details, see the summary report *Climate Leadership, Economic Prosperity* at <http://climate.pembina.org/pub/1909>).

What Happened?

June 4th, 2008: this bill (then known as C-377) won support from a majority of Members of Parliament and was referred to the Senate for consideration. As Parliament was dissolved in the fall of 2008, the bill was not able to complete the legislative process.

February 10th 2009: Bruce Hyer, New Democrat Deputy Environment Critic and MP for Thunder Bay-Superior North, seconded by Jack Layton, reintroduced it as a Private Member's Bill, renamed as Bill C-311.

After months of delays, a contentious request by the House Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development for more time to consider C-311 was granted with the Official Opposition supporting the government on an **Oct 21st, 2009** vote in the House of Commons. Passage of the Climate Change Accountability Act was therefore effectively delayed until 2010, meaning it would not influence the government in negotiations at the UN COP15 global climate change treaty negotiations held in December 2009 in Copenhagen.

March 3rd, 2010: First and Second Reading of Bill C-311 in the House of Commons

The House of Commons Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development gave this bill extensive consideration at committee stage last year. Since then, neither the bill itself nor the science underlying it has changed, although the passage of time has made it even more urgent.

May 5th, 2010: Third Reading of Bill C-311. Following a majority vote in the House of Commons (149-136), the Bill is passed onto the Senate.

At the time Bill C-311 was the first bill to pass in a democratically-elected Parliament which legislated emissions reductions post-Kyoto.

In November 2010 Bill C-311 was killed in the Senate without debate, representing the first time the Senate voted against the will of the both Members of Parliament and the Canadian public. The Bill was referred to the Senate in spring 2010, but had not been debated or referred to a committee for further study. Conservative Senators called a surprise vote on November 16th (the Bill's Second Reading), while many of the Bill's supporters were away, and killed the bill by a vote of 32 yeas to 43 nays. At the time the Bill was the only piece of climate change legislation on the docket.

Reactions:

Keith Stewart of Greenpeace Canada: "The Climate Change Accountability Act (Bill C-311) has been the only strong piece of climate change legislation before Parliament. It has been supported by a majority of MPs twice, and represents the will of the majority of Canadians who want our government to take strong action on climate change. In using an undemocratic, nineteenth-century institution to avoid dealing with the twenty-first century's most pressing environmental problem, the Harper government is being both hypocritical and irresponsible."

Clare Demerse of the Pembina Institute: "It seems clear that the Conservative government doesn't want to be accountable to Canadians about setting and meeting climate targets. This bill would have required the government to publish regular reports explaining its climate policy to Canadians - and as things currently stand, every one of those reports would have created bad headlines for the government."

Steven Guilbeault of Equiterre: "This manipulation of the democratic process is irresponsible and goes against the campaign promises that Stephen Harper made on accountability, transparency and democratic fairness, not to mention Senate reform. The Harper controlled senate has been delaying discussions of this bill for months, and now they have killed it without even the due process in terms of bringing the bill to committee and debating it. It is like a jury arriving at a verdict in a trial without hearing any witnesses or knowing what they need to know about the case."

Graham Saul of Climate Action Network: "In the face of the climate change crisis, and weeks before the United Nations climate talks begin in Cancun, this is a clear signal that this government is refusing to take global warming seriously. Right now, Canada's government is on track to arrive at the UN climate talks in Cancun with no plan to reach its target and having just

killed the country's best chance to do better, despite majority support from MPs and Canadians for stronger climate action."

John Bennett of Sierra Club Canada: "Global warming impacts are already being felt by hundreds of millions of people around the world, including communities here in Canada. This is a brazen move that sends the message that Stephen Harper's government just doesn't care."