

# The Kyoto Protocol and Canada's Last-minute Waffling

By Brian Beare [no proofreader this time]

The Kyoto Protocol is the first amendment to the United Nations Founding Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and spells out mandatory targets for the first stage of the convention's goal of stabilising global greenhouse gas (GHG) emission. Canada has ratified both the UNFCC and the Kyoto protocol thereby committing to reduce emissions to 94% of 1990 levels, averaged over the 2008-2012 period. Between 1990 and its ratifying of the protocol, Canada's emissions increased by 23%. The Canadian government released a \$20-billion plan in 2005 for meeting Kyoto targets, but the government changed hands in early 2006 and the new environment minister has stated that Canada will not meet its target. This is probably a factual statement rather than a statement of policy, but with the future of the plan uncertain and with only two years before the five-year target period begins, it is worth asking whether Canada should try to meet its target.

Comment [T2]: Comma?

Comment [T3]: Comma?

Comment [T4]: Very good first para – states the argument, gives essential background – I must read on!!

Comment [T5]: Singular?

Critics of Canada's participation in the Kyoto protocol question the basic framework of the UNFCCC, and focus on the cost of meeting the Kyoto targets, and the implications of the non-participation of the US. The Alberta government's opposition to Kyoto and the province's disproportionately important oil and gas industry make for additional domestic difficulties. The UNFCCC's exemption of developing countries, especially China and India, which together are responsible for 20% of global emissions, is thought to make the convention unfair and ineffective. Many critics claim that the Kyoto targets will be too economically damaging to meet and it is better to adjust to the coming climate change. So long as the US stays out of Kyoto, imposing reductions on industry will put Canadian businesses at a disadvantage. Finally, while Albertans generally support the Kyoto protocol, their government does not, and long-standing domestic tensions will be aggravated if proceeding with Kyoto appears to slow the Albertan economy.

The arguments in favour of Canada's participation in the Kyoto protocol stress the importance of the goals of the UNFCC, the general benefits of reducing emissions, and Canada's moral responsibility. The UNFCC is the sole international process for combating GHG emissions and has been ratified by almost all nations. Proponents argue that the time for debate on Kyoto has passed and that the perceived flaws of the treaty are outweighed by its international support and uniqueness. Canada is in a position to meet its target by reducing harmful emissions and improving conservation. Ontario is set to meet almost half of its share of cuts by closing its three coal-burning power plants by 2009. Almost a quarter of Canadian emissions are due to individuals (by their use of cars and home heating and electricity) meaning that significant reductions can be met by encouraging conservation through subsidies and information campaigns. These measures are important for Canada regardless of the Kyoto protocol; Kyoto may simply force Canada to proceed more quickly. Finally, Canada has publicly committed itself to the UNFCCC and the Kyoto protocol, voluntarily submitting itself to their binding measures. To pull out or simply ignore its commitments would be damaging to its reputation.

Comment [T6]: Is it a process or a group or a committee or an attempt

There is no easy answer to whether Canada should participate in the Kyoto protocol. It is certainly a flawed and complicated treaty. But many of the difficulties are beside the point, as Canada stands to benefit domestically from the emissions-reducing measures that Kyoto will require. Even if Canada's ties to the US economy prevent reductions to industrial emissions, making the power generation and consumer sectors more efficient will make Canada's air cleaner and reduce the strain on its power generating facilities. It would seem foolish for Canada to damage its international reputation and sabotage a widely supported treaty for the sake of avoiding these sensible steps.

**COMMENT: Excellent essay, Brian. Your logical organization and marshalling of facts and arguments makes it easy to read and follow. Your start sets the scene, impels the reader; your finish summarizes and states your opinion.**

Tony