



Backgrounder: Sustainable Prosperity and Climate Change

Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act – A Year Later

In March 2007 the province boldly proclaimed that Nova Scotia will become “one of the cleanest and most sustainable environments in the world by the year 2020”.

The *Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act* which was assented into law on the 13th of April, 2007¹ outlined a series of goals to achieve this vision and a process for moving forward. The Act requires the Minister of the Environment to report annually to the House of Assembly on the progress made towards achieving the goals. The first annual report by the Minister to mark the “Sustainable Prosperity” Act’s first anniversary will occur on Wednesday, May 14th.

Goals included in the Act relate to water, air pollution and protecting 12% of the province’s land. In some of these areas, such as protected land, the province has taken concrete steps and moved forward over the past year.

One goal that received particular attention from the Premier and Minister of Environment upon the release of the *Act* was the commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, *at least*, 10% below 1990 levels by the year 2020.

In its 2007 throne speech the government emphasized the importance of reducing greenhouse gases because climate change relates too all other environmental issues. The speech stated that “there is no concern with such far-reaching consequences for our planet than climate change”.²

It has now been a year. While other provinces are moving forward Nova Scotians have yet to see significant legislative, regulatory or investment initiatives from their provincial government.

It appears that the Nova Scotia government is floundering in the area of climate change. It risks breaking its own law by not meeting its GHG target. By not acting on climate change the government is negating the benefit of its other environment initiatives and leaving Nova Scotians vulnerable to rising energy costs.

¹ Bill 146, *Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act*, 1st Sess., 60th, Leg., Nova Scotia, 2007 (assented to 13 April 2007, c. 7).

² Nova Scotia Speech from the Throne, Thursday, November 22nd, 2007, pg. 10



Climate Change and the Environment: What the Science is Saying

While the 10% target is touted as aggressive, the scientific projections suggest the province's target will exceed the critical threshold level of 2°C of global warming and be more consistent with 3°C of warming above pre-industrial levels.³

A 3°C of warming above pre-industrial levels is consistent with the following climate change impacts⁴:

- 1) 30% of coastal wetlands are lost worldwide and coastal flooding affects millions more people each year. 70% of Nova Scotians live in coastal areas.
- 2) Significant changes in water availability with potential for more than a billion people suffering from water shortages worldwide.
- 3) Increases in hurricane intensity expected to lead to a doubling of damage costs in the US.
- 4) 20-50% of plant and animal species face extinction and large fractions of ecosystems are unable to maintain their current form.
- 5) Cereal crop yields decrease, leading to food shortages
- 6) Most corals bleached; widespread death of coral reefs; and acidification of the ocean threatening marine ecosystems and commercial fisheries.
- 7) Ecosystems become carbon sources as vegetation burns or decays, creating the risk of irreversible and runaway climate change.

In order for the province to “demonstrate international leadership” and be the “cleanest and most sustainable” the 10% target is clearly a minimum that will need to be significantly exceeded.⁵ Given the “far reaching consequences of climate change” 3°C of warming threatens to negate many of the province's other environmental initiatives. In its first year, the government has missed opportunities to implement policies and practices that will ensure Nova Scotia is on the path to meeting even its modest goal.

Is Nova Scotia a Leader?

In response to a question on climate change reduction targets, Environment Minister Mark Parent recently remarked in the House of Assembly that, “We are leaders. The Province of BC which is touted as one of the leaders, has a similar or perhaps even a percentage point less in terms of their greenhouse gas reductions”.⁶

³ Based on German Federal Environmental Agency report and IPCC's Third Assessment Report as quoted in the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change (http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/sternreview_index.cfm). The German Report, Höhne, N. et al. 2005. *Options for the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol*, p.17-18. Umweltbundesamt; <http://www.umweltbundesamt.org/fpdf-l/2847.pdf> shows 5-25% reductions below 1990 levels by 2020 by developed nations consistent with 650 ppm CO₂e. The Stern Review, pg. 195 IPCC TAR column shows a 92% probability of exceeding 2°C relative to pre-industrial levels at 650 ppm CO₂e, 57% probability of exceeding 3°C, 25% probability of exceeding 4°C.

⁴ Based on National Geographic Magazine, October 2007 and Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, pg. 294.

⁵ The United Nations Meeting in Bali has suggested 25-40% below 1990 levels by 2020 to avoid “dangerous” climate change.

⁶ Hansard 08-20, Second Session, Tuesday April 29th, 2008, pp. 2286-2287.



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British Columbia announced the same target as Nova Scotia (to reduce GHGs 10% below 1990 levels by 2020) at the same time as Nova Scotia. The following chart compares progress between the two jurisdictions.

A Climate Leader and a Climate Loafer?

A Comparison of Nova Scotia and British Columbia's First Year of Climate Action Towards the 10% GHG Reduction Goal

British Columbia	Nova Scotia
Committed to reduce GHGs 10% below 1990 levels by 2020 (Feb 2007).	Committed to reduce GHGs 10% below 1990 levels by 2020 (March 2007)
Investing \$199.3 M of federal government EcoTrust funding.	Investing \$42.5 M of federal government EcoTrust funding.
Provincial budget, introduced a \$10/tonne carbon tax that will rise to \$30/tonne in 2012 and more than \$1 billion in 50 climate action initiatives, including home energy efficiency.	No carbon tax, no increase in energy efficiency budget, small amount for public transport and ill-advised transit tax credit.
2008 budget includes \$370 M to improve and expand public transportation to complement \$69.31 of investment per person between 2003 and 2006.	2008 budget includes \$3 million for rural transport to complement \$0.21 of investment per person between 2003 and 2006.
Joined Western Climate Initiative and implemented "cap and trade" legislation.	Still considering "intensity-based" regulations, which have been widely discredited as fraudulent and ineffective. ⁷
Introduced legislation to meet California Vehicle Emission Standards	No forward progress demonstrated on California Vehicle Emission Standards

Over the past year British Columbia has introduced concrete policies to place a price on carbon pollution and control industrial and vehicle emissions, while making significant budgetary commitments to climate change. Besides spending federal government EcoTrust money Nova Scotia has comparatively little to show in terms of forward progress.

You Need to Do Something to Reduce Emissions

Thus far the only clear step the government has taken towards meeting the GHG reduction goal has been the development of the climate action plan. However, the plan has now been delayed, with the government still considering widely discredited "intensity" based regulations.

⁷ The government of Alberta, George Bush's federal government and the Canadian federal government have all proposed intensity based regulatory initiatives that seek to decrease emissions per unit of production instead of overall emissions. GHG intensity has decreased by 18% while overall emissions have risen 25% from 1990 to 2005 in Canada.



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Even with the release of four climate and energy related plans in Nova Scotia⁸ the province is set to miss a target to reduce emissions to 1990 levels by 2010.⁹ Due to previous foot dragging emissions have increased 16% above 1990 levels by 2005.

While climate and energy plans have not had a good record of reducing emissions, regulations on polluters have. Nova Scotia's air pollution emissions are decreasing because the government has introduced quantitative restrictions on the pollution from Nova Scotia Power.

Currently Nova Scotia Power is responsible for 42% of the provinces emissions. To reduce GHG emissions, the government must regulate the greenhouse gas emissions in the same manner in which it has regulated air pollution.

Conclusion: Less Hot Air and More Climate Action Needed

While Nova Scotia has produced a lot of rhetoric there has been a lack of concrete policy implementation in the area of climate change.

The first year's performance draws into question the government's sincerity and competence in meaningfully protecting the environment, grasping economic development opportunities associated with low-carbon technologies and protecting Nova Scotia from rising energy costs. While "aggressive goals" are touted, there is no evidence to suggest that these goals are being pursued in an aggressive fashion.

A variety of solutions remain for the government to seize. These include:

- 1) Capping industrial GHG emissions
- 2) Dramatically increasing investments in energy efficiency and combined heat and power and introducing efficiency standards for housing, lighting, appliances and equipment
- 3) Implementing California Vehicle Emission Standards
- 4) Bringing sustainable transportation investments in line with the Canadian average
- 5) Revitalizing rural communities by providing grid access for renewable energy through feed-in tariffs.

The solutions to both rising temperatures and rising energy costs are the same. By enhancing efficiency, community energy development, and innovation Nova Scotia can get on a path towards a cleaner environment, international recognition and self-sufficiency. We need to make next year, a year of action.

⁸ Towards a Sustainable Future, 2001 Energy Strategy, the Electricity Marketplace Governance Committee & Green Energy Framework.

⁹ As per New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers Climate Action Plan (2001).