

Global impact of Canadian Carbon targets

We all know Canada is a very large country with a relatively small population. It is true that on a per capita basis we have high greenhouse gas emissions but because of our small population our contribution to global emissions is about 2%. Before the last federal election the Conservative government defined greenhouse reduction targets (17% below 2005 levels by 2020 and 30% below 2005 levels by 2030). At the recent COP21 conference in Paris the new federal Liberal government reiterated these emission targets with new targets to be confirmed at the recent meeting with provincial and territorial leaders. However new targets were not set so as it stands now the Canadian emissions targets remain those established by the Conservatives.

If Canada meets these targets what impact will they have on reducing global emissions? The most recent numbers show global emissions at 36.6 billion tonnes while according to Environment Canada, Canadian emissions were 726 million tonnes. The 2005 Canadian emissions were recorded at 749 million tonnes. Therefore if we meet the 2020 target of 17% below 2005 emissions we get a reduction of 104 million tonnes which is 0.288% of global emissions. If we meet the 2030 target of 30% below 2005 we get a reduction of 202 million tonnes which is 0.561% of global emissions. In fact as stated earlier if all Canadian emissions were eliminated there would only be a 2% reduction in global emissions.

So what will the 0.28% to 0.56% reduction in global greenhouse emissions mean to climate change when Canada reaches the defined target? Especially when global emissions have already been reduced by 17.1% from the 2005 global emissions of 44.153 billion tonnes (reported by the World Resources Institute) and dire global climate changes are still being forecast. Is it worth dramatically impact the Canadian economy and way of life for the minimal reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions that will be achieved if Canada meets reduction targets? Are there better ways for Canada to assist in the Climate Change fight such as carbon capture and storage (CC&S) technology? If such CC&S technology can be developed by Canada and applied to new and existing fossil fuel energy production in the world (in 2012 60% of world energy was from oil and coal) global emissions could be greatly reduced and global sales of Canadian technology would have significant positive impacts on the economy.

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