bay-du-nord-project-puts-canada-on-path-to-stay-a-global-outlier-in-climate-change-fight-warn-critics

NEWS

Bay du Nord project puts Canada on path to stay a global 'outlier' in climate change fight, warn critics

By KEVIN PHILIPUPILLAI (/AUTHOR/KEVIN-PHILIPUPILLAI) APRIL 11, 2022

Green Party critic Imre Szeman says Canadians still see themselves as 'good guys' on the world stage, but the Liberal government is 'timid about making the hard decisions around the oil and gas sector.'



Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault's office defended the government's approval of the Bay du Nord project, saying it would be subject to 'some of the strongest environmental conditions ever, including the historic requirement to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.' The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

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Enterionmentalists say Ottawa's approval of the Bay du Nord offshore oil project—a week after the release of the federal warnete
gaviting 4355126) missions reduction plan and two days after the International Panel on Climate Change's latest report—marks
fight, Carrage as an "outlier" on the world stage. But they say Canadians don't see themselves that way. critics&url=https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/04/11/bay-
The Bay du Nord project, located approximately 500 kilometres off the coast of St. John's, N.L., will be Canada's first deep-water oi
pigieiq: It is expected to produce approximately one billion (https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-ottawa-approves-
bayndwanord-oil-development-off-coast-of-newfoundland/) barrels of oil over a 30-year lifetime. on-
path- Julia Levin, senior climate and energy program manager at the advocacy group Environmental Defence, told <i>The Hill Times</i> that UN
Sectaviary-General António Guterres has been using increasingly sharp language to draw attention to the climate crisis, and to
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"We got the 'code red,' 'red alert,' 'death knell for fossil fuels' in August, then we got the 'atlas of human suffering' last month, and now we get the 'litany of broken climate promises,'" said Levin, recounting Guterres' rhetoric.



UN Secretary-General António Guterres, pictured in April 2017 with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, didn't mince words on April 4 when he referred to 'countries that are increasing the production of fossil fuels' as 'dangerous radicals.' UN photograph by Mark Garten

In a formal statement (https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sgsm21228.doc.htm) in New York on April 4 to mark the release of the latest IPCC report, Guterres referred to "countries that are increasing the production of fossil fuels" as "dangerous radicals" and said that "investing in new fossil fuels infrastructure is moral and economic madness." The report highlighted how the energy sector accounted for about one-third of emissions in 2019, and without immediate, major transitions, limiting global warming to 1.5 C would be beyond reach.

Imre Szeman, the Green Party's critic for climate change, told *The Hill Times* he worries that these criticisms won't get through to most Canadians.

"For two decades, it has been pointed out to Canadians that they are, on a per capita basis, amongst the worst offenders when it comes to CO2 production," said Szeman, the University of Waterloo's research chair on environmental communication. "I would hope Canadians see themselves as an outlier and react in the appropriate way. I'm not sure that that's going to happen."

NDP MP Laurel Collins (Victoria, B.C.), who quoted Guterres' remarks when she rose in the House to oppose the Bay du Nord project, told *The Hill Times* she thinks Canadians are demanding bolder climate action from the government, especially after the heat dome and the extreme flooding that hit her province last year.

"[The Liberals] are headed in the wrong direction," said Collins, her party's environment critic, "but this is not a change in direction. They've been headed in the wrong direction for the past six years."

Responding to a question from *The Hill Times* about how the approval of a large new fossil fuel project affects Canada's international standing, Kaitlin Power, press secretary to Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que.), said the government had accepted the recommendation of the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC). In the email, Power said the Bay du Nord project would be subject to "some of the strongest environmental conditions ever, including the historic requirement to reach net-zero emissions by 2050."

Power said the Bay du Nord project would be "almost five times less emissions intensive than the average Canadian oil and gas project, and 10 times less than the average project in the oil sands," and added that this would be "an example of how Canada can chart a path forward on producing energy at the lowest possible emissions intensity, while transitioning to a net-zero future."

In an April 6 (https://iaac-aeic.gc.ca/050/evaluations/document/143501?culture=en-CA) press release, the IAAC said the Bay du Nord Development Project "fits within the government's plan to reach an overall 40 per cent reduction in emissions compared to 2005 levels by 2030, as laid out in the Emissions Reduction Plan."

Levin, from Environmental Defence, countered that the rhetoric around "clean oil" ignores the fact that only 10 per cent of the emissions from an oil project come during the process of getting the oil out of the ground, with the other 90 per cent coming when the oil is burned.

Levin said Canada is the only G7 country to have increased emissions since signing the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015. "We also give more fossil fuel subsidies and public financing than any other G20 country."

On March 31, two days after Ottawa unveiled the long-awaited emissions reduction plan, Environmental Defence released a report (https://environmentaldefence.ca/report/buyerbeware/), titled *Buyer Beware: Fossil Fuel Subsidies and Carbon Capture Fairy Tales in Canada*, that argued the government is propping up oil and gas companies when real climate solutions aren't being properly funded.

The report says the federal government and its agencies provided a total of \$8.6-billion in fossil fuel subsidies in 2021, and estimated that all levels of government have provided a total of \$5.8-billion in public subsidies for carbon capture and storage since 2000.

Budget 2022 set aside \$2.6-billion (https://budget.gc.ca/2022/report-rapport/chap3-en.html#2022-4) over the next five years for an investment tax credit for the development of carbon capture, utilization, and storage, which Levin criticized as an "unproven and speculative techno-fix."

Carbon capture technology is key to the government's contention that Canada can increase or maintain fossil fuel production levels while cutting its overall emissions.

"In the February IPCC report, we saw, for the first time, Canadian and American oil companies getting called out by the IPCC for their role in blocking climate action. We've never seen the world scientists say anything like that before," said Levin. That language



Julia Levin from Environmental Defence says the rhetoric around 'clean oil' is misleading because it ignores emissions created when the oil is burned. Photograph courtesy of Julia Levin

appeared again in the April report from IPCC scientists, but Levin said it was stripped out of the summary for policy-makers by behind-the-scenes lobbying.





Imre Szeman, the Green party's climate change critic, says Canadians are insulated from international criticism by the 'post-war framing of Canada as one of the good guys on the international stage.' Photograph courtesy of Imre Szeman

Szeman said he thinks many Canadians are insulated from international criticism of the country's environmental record by two defining characteristics of their self-image: the "long-standing post-war framing of Canada as one of the good guys on the international stage," and the powerful narrative that Canadian jobs are tied to resource extraction, even if the data doesn't always reflect that.

"What becomes more alarming is that this government isn't trying to change that message," said Szeman, adding that the current government is "timid about making the hard decisions around the oil and gas sector," and that it is "playing the game of what looks good, but might not do the right work."

Beyond the IPCC's recommendations, Szeman pointed to the fact that the International Energy Agency, which he said had been less inclined towards climate worries in the past, has said that there must be no development (https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/18/no-new-investment-in-fossil-fuels-demands-top-energy-economist) of new oil and gas fields if the world is to meet 2050 net zero emissions targets.

"That agency has said that, as of 2023, there really cannot be any new projects, and there has to be a drawdown on existing projects. The message of the Bay Du Nord [approval] is the absolute opposite," said Szeman.

Szeman said the timing of cabinet approval for Bay du Nord, less than a week after the release of the emissions reduction plan, reminded him of June 2019, when the Liberals introduced a successful motion in the House of Commons declaring (https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/climate-emergency-motion-1.5179802) that Canada was in a national climate emergency, hours before cabinet formally approved the purchase of the Trans Mountain pipeline.

He said the practice of pairing potentially positive announcements with long-term decisions that further entrench the oil and gas sector in the Canadian economy was "greenwashing of the worst kind."

Szeman also questioned how much real opposition the Liberals would face on the political stage, given the confidence and supply agreement between the Liberals and the NDP.

Collins and NDP natural resources critic Charlie Angus (Timmins-James Bay, Ont.) released a statement (https://www.ndp.ca/news/liberals-continue-rubberstamp-oil-projects-fail-invest-workers-or-solutions-worsening-climate) on April 6 criticizing the Bay du Nord "rubberstamp" and calling it an example of the Liberals listening "to their corporate buddies from the oil and gas sector instead of listening to climate scientists."

"We are going to continue to push this government to reverse course and to stop handing out billions of dollars to big oil and gas companies," said Collins, who sits on the six-person committee of Liberal and NDP MPs that will meet regularly to review the deal.

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby-South, B.C.) has previously mentioned that back-to-work legislation would qualify as an example of a red line that might lead him to pull his support for the Liberals. Following the April 7 budget, which Singh said his



NDP MP Laurel Collins sits on the new six-person committee that will meet regularly to review the agreement between the two parties. *Photograph courtesy of Twitter*

party would support, he criticized the government's chapter on green transition and the environment, speaking broadly on the

topic of support for oil companies.

"The path of using public money to invest in fossil fuels is the wrong path," he said.

Bloc Quebecois Leader Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil-Chambly, Que.) was equally critical of the budget on environmental issues, saying he believes the Liberal government "intends to be the instrument of the oil and gas industry. The difference between this government and the Conservatives is that the Conservatives will admit it."

The Bloc's critic for natural resources and energy, Mario Simard (Jonquière, Que.), added in an April 7 press release that the Bay du Nord approval was "undoubtedly one of the worst decisions of this government to date, and unfortunately, the whole planet will suffer."

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