

Council of Canadians' presentation to NS Law Amendments, on
Bill 57 – The Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act (EGCCRA)
01Nov2021, 9:50pm

Territorial acknowledgement

I'd like to give deep thanks to Elder Marshall for speaking to this committee about two-eyed seeing, which is such an important part of this bill. I stand in solidarity with protection of the unceded and unsurrendered lands of Mi'kma'ki, where most if not all of us call home. From my work with the Grassroots Grandmothers and other Indigenous water protectors and land defenders, I continue to learn about the importance of treaty and how to be a better ally. This comes with a decision to always prioritize the land and water over corporate interests, and a realization that in order for the planet to survive, we need to do a deep reassess of our colonial ways.

I know it's been a long day for many of you, hearing from many people on this bill and others! I appreciate being added to the list of speakers after a cancellation gave me this space, and I'll send along my comments to Legislative Council after I finish here.

I'm the Atlantic Regional Organizer with The Council of Canadians, a social justice advocacy organization that works to build power in communities. I've been privileged to support movements to Stop Alton Gas, fracking, uranium mining, the Energy East pipeline, Northern Pulp, and so on. We continue to work with communities and allied organizations to ensure no offshore drilling happens. However, this work often feels very piecemeal, and I'll speak more to this shortly.

Our organization is held together by the shared belief that another world is possible – one where we take care of each other and the planet we live on, and where people and communities are afforded more rights and respect than corporations and the super-wealthy.

It is with that belief that I speak to you today. We are in a climate crisis. This crisis is an unfortunately logical conclusion of centuries of colonization of Indigenous lands, and the oppression and abuse of the world's Indigenous peoples - here in Nova Scotia the Mi'kmaq Nation. This colonization of land and people enabled the accumulation of wealth by a few, as a result of taking the wealth of many. In the past few decades corporations have amassed incredible wealth and have paid for access to innumerable government decision making processes and public forums, including those that are meant to address the climate crisis. This is the root of the climate crisis, and we cannot forget that as we make this bill. This is a crisis of inequality, wealth accumulation, and political power that is now manifesting as climate change.

We need to collectively transform society – from the extreme inequality and disconnection from the very real ecological crisis we are experiencing today, to a society that prioritizes people’s health, wellbeing, community, and dignity, and recognizes that people and the planet are inseparable.

I’ve been watching presentations throughout the day as I’ve been able, and want to second many of the points raised by several other speakers which reflect our perspective on Bill 57 – The Sierra Club Canada Foundation, the Ecology Action Centre, the Climate Emergency Unit, ECLAW, Healthy Bays Coalition, Canadian Federation of Students NS, and on.

To this, I’d like to be transparent that we have not had the time to do a full analysis of the bill and dive deeply to propose specific language amendments, so trust you will reflect on proposals already made by the groups I’ve listed and others who spoke to environmental racism and equity points, along with emission reduction targets, coal phase-out, and the need for a better framework around external accountability.

We too generally support the spirit and intent of this bill, and feel strongly that the climate crisis truly needs to be treated as such – a crisis, as with the COVID pandemic – and that now is the time to move towards a just transition. A crisis requires up-to-date data collection and communication. A crisis requires research and advice from experts in the field to tackle the issue with an immediate and aggressive response. A crisis requires grassroots and communities to be part of the solution.

The Council, along with the Ecology Action Centre and the Sierra Club Canada Foundation, released polling this past June which revealed

- 85% of Nova Scotians agree that, as the province recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, priority should be placed on moving away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy and efficiency systems, which would include training and income support for affected workers.
- There is also agreement among 78% of people in Nova Scotia that priority should be placed on women, people of colour, Indigenous people, and other groups made vulnerable by the current economy, so they can participate in the workforce in more equitable ways.

A just transition includes an immediate and comprehensive transition away from extractive practices. It of course does not include coal, offshore drilling, mega-sponsoring of oil and gas conferences in Morocco, or frankly any fossil fuel or mineral extraction on Mi’kmaq lands, so more can and needs to be done.

The current NS government can be a leader on a just transition, like we've been a leader during the COVID crisis. And we have seen some leadership on these issues in the past, including on Northern Pulp. The government's decision to no longer allow the toxic legacy of environmental racism to continue in Boat Harbour was the right decision. Another example is fracking: with public pressure through the Wheeler consultations and report, a moratorium passed in the Nova Scotia legislature.

But too often, we see decisions to cancel fossil fuel or extractive projects in Nova Scotia not made by a sitting government, rather by corporations, and only then after significant pressure from local communities. Take Alton Gas as the latest example, and Goldboro LNG just before it. And then there is offshore drilling, where it appears no major company is interested in exploring or drilling, and 12 municipalities have passed resolutions calling on a moratorium and public inquiry. Communities want to see you pass this bill with the strong mechanisms we need to meet our climate targets and address inequality.

Relying on market forces – or corporations – won't be enough. Communities and working people have witnessed too many hollowed out communities and poverty wages jobs left behind from market booms and busts or unjust trade deals. We need a comprehensive approach that creates good green jobs and drives inclusive workforce development, led by and including affected workers and communities.

With this bill, there is opportunity to address the bigger picture instead of the piecemeal approach and I encourage you to further consider this combined with the knowledge that **we are in crisis** and that **the public supports major action**. Thank you.

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I am thankful to live and work in *Mi'kma'ki*, the unceded ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaw people.