



WINTER 2015

Bridging the divestment divide

By Robyn Meyer, PICS senior communications officer

Fossil fuel divestment has got people talking, judging by the interest in PICS' new white paper on divestment that was released this winter, not to mention the attention the divestment movement is garnering within the media and in boardrooms around the world. Institutions, including the four PICS universities, are being urged to drop their holdings in oil, gas and coal companies for ethical, environmental and economic reasons by home-grown campaigns on their campuses. Investors around the globe managing more than \$50 billion (US) of combined assets have already committed to divest, raising a timely question of how to most effectively use that money.

The white paper *Fossil Fuel Divestment: Reviewing Arguments, Implications & Policy Opportunities*, released on January 29, examined the potential impacts of divesting institutional holdings of oil, gas and coal companies on: (a) keeping fossil fuels in the ground, (b) protecting investors from exposure to unburnable carbon and (c) reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The report offered a concrete example of how divestment could impact the endowment at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Written by UBC PhD student Justin Ritchie and UBC Professor Hadi Dowlatabadi, the report recommends practical steps that can be taken by governments and financial institutions to amplify the significant social impact of divestment, by ensuring that divested funds can directly help in financing society's transition to a low carbon sustainable future.

Despite the world's current heavy reliance on fossil fuel energy and its prevalence throughout the global economy, the authors identified a range of intermediate policies that could enable institutions to finance fundamental change in the structure of the economy through divesting, even without a broader national carbon policy framework. Policy [recommendations](#)

include the creation of new alternate "green" investment vehicles as safe havens for investors. Closer to home, the paper's recommendations for British Columbia (BC) include the creation of an "energy transition bank" offering bonds and other financial tools to ease investors into the low carbon economy, and to better support BC's green tech sector. Investment tax credits to attract private capital to domestic low-carbon ventures were another option put forward, alongside a host of ways to better enable fund managers to accurately weigh up the carbon and financial implications of different investment allocations within their institutional portfolios. The authors also warned that investors using the divestment movement to pour tons of capital into renewable energy companies may inadvertently harm the industry. A sudden large influx of capital from fossil fuels to renewables could create artificially inflated stock values in the relatively young sector, resulting in a boom-bust scenario.

The findings weren't without their critics, with some taking issue with the authors' finding little or no evidence to support the following claims put forward by some in the divestment movement that divestment will protect investors from the risk of stranded carbon assets, that it will keep fossil fuels in the ground, and that 'green' energy stocks can substitute for fossil fuel holdings in the portfolio of institutional investors. As pointed out in the report, since the vast majority of future fossil fuel reserves are owned by governments, not publicly listed companies, many of the world's reserves are outside the reach of investor action.

Critics believe the report missed the point of the divestment movement by providing little focus on its [theory of change](#), which is to "morally bankrupt" the fossil fuel industry. Some respondents also felt that any call for gradual change plays into the hands of those wanting to maintain the status quo. A subsequent

PICS is hosted and led by the University of Victoria in collaboration with the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University and the University of Northern British Columbia.



Divestment Protest. Photo from James Ennis, via flickr



Panelists Malcolm Boothroyd and Steve Douglas at the PICS-UVic forum on divestment. Photo by Hugo Wong.

independent [analysis](#) of the 'shadow impact calculator' used in the report suggested that the authors could have selected different renewable energy companies to replace the fossil fuel companies in UBC's endowment.

Separate to the white paper, on January 26, PICS and the University of Victoria co-hosted a public forum on divestment, featuring panelists that represented key interests within the divestment debate – Steve Douglas, vice president of investor relations at Suncor Energy; Divest UVic represented by student Malcolm Boothroyd; Cary Krosinsky, co-founder of the Carbon Tracker Initiative; Crystal Lameman from the Beaver Lake Cree Nation; and columnist Stephen Hume, from the Vancouver Sun. Despite calls from Hume for the need for everyone to “paddle (the canoe) in the same direction” the event highlighted the polarization of views on divestment, despite the panel's common goal of reducing global GHG emissions. The informative, and at times, passionate exchange of ideas during the forum can be viewed on the PICS [video archive](#).

Such ongoing discussion and sharing of ideas are a vital part of finding solutions that will successfully transition our carbon-dependent lifestyles into a new sustainable reality. Divestment is a socially important and economically complex issue. PICS welcomes further contributions to its [online hub](#) dedicated to this ongoing discussion.

High demand for PICS internships

The annual winter call for applications for the popular PICS internship program resulted in nearly two-dozen proposals being received—all of very high quality. The internship program provides \$10,000 (in addition to a maximum of \$6000 matching funds for crown corporations and private sector) to support the hiring of university students from one of the four PICS consortium universities to work for up to four-month placements on topics that align with PICS' mission and objectives. These internships enhance the students' knowledge and expertise in the area of climate change, and integrate that knowledge into mitigation and/or

adaptation solutions. PICS executive director Tom Pedersen says the program has seen great success in the past five years, with very positive feedback from both supervisors and the students, who are ambassadors for PICS. Its success has resulted in program expansion, with a total of 14 projects funded in 2015, up from 10 to 12 in past years. Organizations this year that will host PICS interns across a wide range of mitigation and adaptation issues include the following:

- BC Ministry of Forests, Lands & Natural Resource Operations – Research Climatologist Assistant
- City of Kelowna – Intern, Sustainable Transportation Planning
- Prince George Chamber of Commerce – Carbon Management
- Climate Smart Businesses, Inc. – Data Analysis and Client Support
- Pembina Institute – Buildings and Energy Efficiency
- Keystone Environmental – Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation Research Assistant

Each of these organizations will be posting its internship position at each of the four PICS universities in upcoming weeks. Please visit university co-op and careers websites to find out more about these positions.

Climate Justice conversations

Thirty-six people from all walks of life across Metro Vancouver got to share their ideas and concerns about how climate change will impact their lives and province in a series of four PICS-supported winter/spring workshops, organized by the Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives (CCPA) as part of the ongoing UBC Climate Justice Project.

This Changes BC: Conversations on Climate Justice, an outreach and engagement initiative, kicked off on Valentine's Day at the Creekside Community Centre in East Vancouver,



Participants in the Climate Justice Project winter workshops

with participants reporting that even this initial conversation made them feel less isolated by the threat of climate change and convinced they could make a difference. The second day, February 28th, was spent diving into topics around built form, local transportation, impacts of climate change and sustainable communities. Stephen Sheppard, director of UBC's Collaborative for Advanced Landscape Planning (CALP) and PICS program committee member, led the group in a series of activities including identifying potential local climate impacts. The third day focused more broadly on BC's rural roots, with discussions focused on food, waste, energy, resources and local actions people can take. The fourth and final workshop is on March 28.

The CCPA says the workshops will help the Climate Justice research network develop a deeper understanding of public perceptions, values and attitudes related to social justice issues as they intersect with climate policy, as well as allow them to test policy recommendations in relation to public opinion. Education resources are planned as a spin-off from the project, with the broader goal of developing a useful engagement model on climate change adaptation and mitigation that could be scaled-up to other parts of BC and Canada.

Northern businesses reduce carbon footprints

The Prince George Chamber of Commerce has teamed up with the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) and PICS to help local businesses reduce their carbon footprints. The course, *Carbon Management: The intersection of Business and Environmentalism*, offered by the Environmental Studies and the Natural Resources and Environmental Studies programs, will work with 10 local businesses to measure their corporate carbon footprints and investigate recommendations for carbon reductions and energy savings. "This service will be offered for free, and will benefit both students and businesses," says Kyle Aben, course instructor and PICS UNBC program coordinator, "It will give students the opportunity to solve real-world business problems. Meanwhile, businesses have an opportunity to save money through implementing the recommendations."

Businesses involved with the class are from the entire business community of Prince George and include farms, restaurants, piano tuners, and even a tattoo



"Extreme Heat" panelists Anders Knudby, Sarah Henderson, and moderator Tim Takaro.

shop. Sponsored by CN, there will be an opportunity for student interns to help the local businesses implement some of the recommendations provided over the summer of 2015. The goal is to enable businesses in the north to become more aware of their impacts and lessen their carbon emissions while realizing economic returns.

Mapping extreme temperatures in the Lower Mainland

The collaborative PICS-SFU/PICS-UBC public lecture series launched the first of its ongoing presentation series in 2015 with lectures from leading researchers Drs. **Sarah Henderson** (UBC) and **Anders Knudby** (SFU) on mapping extreme heat events and associated risks

on human health. Held on January 22 in downtown Vancouver, the event was moderated by **Tim Takaro**, SFU Professor and PICS Program Committee member. Spells of extremely hot weather can be a serious health threat in British Columbia and climate change models indicate that such heat-wave events will become more frequent and intense over the coming decades. In the summer of 2009, for example, the Lower Mainland experienced a 7-day heat wave that resulted in an estimated 114 excess deaths. As a result of this event, Dr. Henderson has been involved in the research and development of a new local Heat Health Warning System to assist health agencies and the general public to better prepare for hot weather. Dr. Knudby provided insights into Greater Vancouver's unique urban heat "archipelago," and demonstrated how health authorities and local governments can identify, measure and map health-risk hot spots throughout the region. The recording of their talks can be viewed on the PICS Event Archive at <http://pics.uvic.ca/events/archive/webcast>.

Canada Winter Games achieves carbon neutrality

The 2015 Canada Winter Games which ran from February 13—March 1 will leave a legacy of sustainability as well as national sporting excellence, thanks the efforts of PICS, the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) and games organizers in securing carbon neutrality status for the event.

PICS UNBC Program Coordinator and certified greenhouse gas inventory quantifier, Kyle Aben, worked pro bono with the Games Sustainability Manager, Emily Harrison, to calculate the games' carbon footprint. There were 47 greenhouse gas (GHG) emission sources attributable to the sporting event including; all emissions from operations and business travel for the years leading up to and during the games as well as inter-venue commutes once the games were underway, the emissions created by the venues themselves,



PICS Program Coordinator Kyle Aben being interviewed on CKPG TV.

and emissions from athlete and coaches'

accommodations while in Prince George. Emily and Kyle then worked with the UNBC Student Sustainability Committee to identify carbon credit companies to approach to offset the approximately 583 CO₂ tonnes of carbon emissions created by the games.



The Charles Jago Northern Sports Centre, host to the carbon-neutral 2015 Canada Winter Games

In early March it was announced that Tolko Industries made carbon neutrality a reality by donating the required carbon credits from its gasification project that turns wood waste into renewable syngas. Tolko is a Canadian owned forestry company based out of Vernon, BC that manufactures specialty forest products for sale around the world. In 2005, Tolko purchased a 38 MMBtu/hr Nexterra gasification system to produce renewable syngas for use in its operations. The syngas displaces the use of natural gas and the associated emissions. The project had other benefits as well by reducing volatile organic emissions (VOC) and particulate emissions through the closure of a beehive burner. Organizers are grateful to Tolko for taking leadership on climate change, for making the 2015 Canada Winter Games carbon neutral.

Energy efficiency and green buildings



Lorina Keery from Colliers International Canada on "Thinking Outside the Box: Energy Efficiency and Green Buildings" (December, 2014)

Globally, one of the fastest growing industries is the green building sector, with a daily influx of new innovative technologies, approaches and

regulations, geared toward sustainability and

energy efficiency. In late December PICS sponsored the Green Tech Exchange Forum *Thinking Outside the Box: Energy Efficiency and Green Buildings* panel discussion, featuring leading industry experts: Helen Goodland from Brantwood Consulting and co-founder of the tech incubator Building Technology Innovations; Lorina Keery, sustainability manager at Colliers International Canada; and Tadz

Brown, business development manager at Energex Inc. The panelists shared some of the success stories emerging in "green buildings" and offered an entertaining tour of some of the real and radical new products and approaches that are causing construction companies to rethink their business models. The event attracted more than 100 people among entrepreneurs, students and public in general. The next GTEx forum "*Beyond Compost: Closing the Organic Waste Loop for a Greener Economy*" will take place in SFU Vancouver campus on March 25th. Visit the PICS event calendar for details on upcoming lectures.

Coming up in Spring.....

PICS events on the horizon:

- On March 26th, PICS, the French Consulate General in Vancouver and Carbon Talks will be co-hosting a free public lecture "*From Local to Global Challenges, What Needs to Be Done for a Successful Climate Conference in Paris 2015?*", featuring speakers: Hon. **Mary Polak**, B.C. Minister of Environment, **Gregor Robertson**, Mayor of Vancouver and **Nicolas Chapuis**, Newly appointed Ambassador of France to Canada. This event has already been fully registered, but will be available by webcast.
- On April 8th in Victoria and 9th in Vancouver, PICS will be hosting evening lectures with **Dr. Gavin Schmidt**. Dr. Schmidt is the Director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).
- PICS is proud to be a partner in presenting "*EARTHKEEPING: A Climate for Change with Katharine Hayhoe*", May 7th in Vancouver. **Katharine Hayhoe** is an atmospheric scientist who studies climate change and she is well known for the way she is bridging the gap between scientists and Christians.

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