

The Province (Vancouver, BC)
G-8 stalls as others battle climate woes
Quebec leads on carbon tax, UBC Fisheries Centre fights ocean decline
James McNulty, Sunday, June 10, 2007

It came as no surprise to learn the world's G-8 leaders did absolutely nothing to fight global warming at their much-ballyhooed German talks. The best they could muster, after the usual objections from the United States and the usual vacillating from Canada, was a promise to "seriously consider" the goal of halving greenhouse-gas emissions by 2050.

Anyone seeking genuine action on climate change while G-8 leaders spun their wheels had to look much closer to home. Quebec, to its credit, became the first province to introduce a carbon tax on all hydrocarbon fuels, beginning Oct. 1.

Ranging from 0.5-cents-per-litre on propane to 0.9-cents-per-litre on gasoline to \$8-per-tonne of coal, Quebec's carbon tax will raise \$200 million a year to fight GHG emissions and improve public transit.

The call for carbon taxes, which follows the "polluter pays" principle, is no nutty leftist scheme. No less than the august Conference Board of Canada endorsed carbon taxes just a few days before Quebec's move.

Green Party leader Elizabeth May also announced carbon taxes as a major election plank, claiming they are essential to reducing GHG output.

May's plan would see carbon taxes used to reduce income and payroll taxes, while creating incentives to go green and cut GHG emissions.

While Quebec, the Conference Board and the Green Party advance the necessary debate, Stephen Harper's Conservatives delay the inevitable by sticking to an "emissions intensity" reduction scheme that will see GHG emissions continue to rise.

Harper has also abandoned his own Clean Air Act after agreeing to have it sent to a House committee for reworking. It was strengthened with carbon caps, and when Harper ignored the action, opposition parties passed a motion two weeks ago demanding he bring it back to the House for debate.

Harper, who in opposition in 2005 said "the prime minister has the moral responsibility to respect the will of the House," has now abandoned that view to ignore the Clean Air Act motion.

The Harper government is also using the Senate to stall a Liberal private member's bill calling on Canada to respect its Kyoto obligations.

While the GGH nonsense continues, another important day passed almost unnoticed Friday -- World Oceans Day -- replete with more warnings about the fragile state of the globe's great water and fish resources.

The University of British Columbia's Fisheries Centre, under director Daniel Pauly, has taken a leading role on the world stage in researching overfishing, discovering that much of it flows from government subsidies to fisheries that would otherwise be unprofitable.

Pauly and a group of 124 other senior world scientists recently called on the World Trade Organization to end some \$30-billion-plus worth of "bad subsidies" for decimated fisheries, a view supported by the United States.

The Fisheries Centre says Canada gives out \$256-million per year in "bad subsidies" that perpetuate fishing in decimated stocks. Canada also opposed recent efforts to ban destructive deep-sea trawl fishing, a move recently taken by South Pacific nations.

Much remains to be done. Consumers can help by avoiding threatened species; www.seachoice.org offers a list of sustainable fish choices.