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Climate considerations risk being undermined in proposed changes to Bill C-69 and key regulations: environmental groups

Ottawa, Ont. – Last week, 26 leading environmental organisations from across the country sent a letter to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna, outlining serious concerns with several components of the government’s new environmental assessment framework.

The concerns center on two major supporting components of Bill C-69 – the ‘Project List’ of industrial projects requiring assessment and the Strategic Assessment of Climate Change – as well as nearly 200 amendments to the bill itself that have been introduced by the Senate committee reviewing the bill. Taken together, the legislative and regulatory package would fall short of aligning with the deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions that are required to minimize catastrophic climate breakdown, as laid out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

“When Bill C-69 was first announced, many environmental groups supported the bill as an important step towards strengthening Canada’s broken environmental assessment framework. By introducing climate as a required consideration for projects, the bill ensured that approvals for future industrial projects would more closely align with Canada’s domestic and international climate commitments. However, the Senate committee reviewing the bill has put forth nearly 200 amendments, many of which would destroy the integrity of the bill in the interest of the oil and gas industry. If these components proceed as currently proposed we will have no choice but to withdraw our support from Bill C-69” says Julia Levin, Climate and Energy Program Manager with Environmental Defence.

Environmental groups urge the government to reject Senate amendments that would further weaken environmental protections and Canada’s ability to meet its climate targets.

“The main point of introducing new legislation was to restore credibility to environmental assessment. Amendments from Newfoundland and other oil producing provinces which enfeeble the Act, such as allowing Petroleum Boards to dominate review panels, will do the opposite,” says Mark Butler, Policy Director at Ecology Action Centre.

Earlier this month, the Government of Canada released its proposed “Project List” regulations – essentially a list of projects that must undergo a federal impact assessment under Bill C-69. “As proposed, these regulations leave us worse off than our current rules,” says Derek Coronado, Coordinator at the Citizens Environment Alliance of Southwestern Ontario. After nearly three years of participating in good faith in consultation processes, these groups feel their arguments have been ignored in order to accommodate the oil and gas industry.

“We are extremely disappointed that the Project List does not include a greenhouse gas trigger to ensure that high carbon projects are federally assessed. In their current form, the proposed regulations would exempt high carbon projects like in situ oil sands projects, pipelines, offshore oil and gas exploratory drilling, and fracking, from federal review,” says Levin. “For virtually every activity with impacts on the environment — pipelines, mines, nuclear reactors, highways — the proposed project list would be weakened compared to the current list. Only renewable energy projects would face tighter thresholds.”

The government has also put forth what it calls a Strategic Assessment of Climate Change (SACC), which is intended to provide a decision-making framework for assessing how an individual project will hinder or contribute to Canada’s climate commitments. As it currently stands, the proposed SACC does not meet that standard. It also excludes downstream greenhouse gas emissions. If Canada is serious about doing its fair share to achieve the Paris agreement, then it must acknowledge the lifecycle emissions of Canadian energy and industrial projects.

So far, the government has not replied to the letter.

The full letter can be read [here](#).

Background information:

- [About Bill C-69: Senate amendments](#)
- [About the Project List](#)
- [About the Strategic Assessment on Climate Change](#)