



3 December 2007

**BC Sustainable Energy Association speaking notes  
for a presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance  
on the Pre-Budget Consultations 2007:  
“The tax system the country needs for a prosperous future”**

Greetings Mr. Chair, Vice-Chairs, Committee Members:

The BC Sustainable Energy Association is a not-for-profit society registered in British Columbia. It has eight chapters around the province and some six hundred members, including individuals, businesses, municipalities and other organizations.

Our vision is a future in which British Columbia’s energy comes from clean, renewable, efficient sources, so that we can meet our present energy needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

We are motivated by a strong sense of urgency. The climate change that is taking place now has become undeniable, as has the main driver of it: human-caused greenhouse gases emissions, particularly from the burning of fossil fuels.

Also, fossil fuel resources around the world – especially natural gas and oil – are becoming scarcer and more expensive. The large, easily accessible resources are becoming depleted, and the scarcity is increased by the dramatic rise in the global demand for energy.

Finally, the environmental effects of developing energy resources are inadequately addressed in society’s planning. This is especially evident in the production of non-conventional fossil fuels such as coal-bed methane and tar sands. Great quantities of water are used up and contaminated, at a time of increasing water scarcity and predictions of increasing droughts and water stress due to climate change.

These present consultations are entitled: “*The tax system the country needs for a prosperous future.*” True long-term prosperity cannot be achieved by a business-as-usual approach. The main thrust of the BCSEA’s submission to this committee is that the federal tax system should – as a priority co-equal with other tax priorities, such as revenues and economic stimulation – encourage a broad societal shift away from fossil fuel use and other greenhouse gas emitting activities.

Present economic valuations still systematically ignore or discount the harm of climate change, the long-term global depletion of fossil fuels and the strategic benefits of diversity in energy systems. Instead, we see continuing, massive investments that are based on the false premise of supposedly “cheap” fossil fuels.

Climate change has already hit British Columbia, through the mountain pine beetle infestation. This is destroying our interior forests and the economies that depend on them. Dollar losses are in the hundreds of millions. The personal and social losses are incalculable.

Although the causes of climate change are global, and Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions are small on a global scale, it is still critical for Canada to act to control its emissions.

First, the only practical way to control emissions globally is through international co-operation. Canada's present example as one of the highest per-capita emitters in the world stands as a powerful disincentive to other nations to take effective action. If we improve our performance, we encourage others to do likewise, to the benefit of all.

Second, we should anticipate not only that fossil fuels will become scarcer and more expensive, but that the international community may impose disincentives on greenhouse gas emissions and promote non-greenhouse gas emitting energies. If we remain over-invested in fossil fuels, we can expect to suffer economic disadvantages and lose trade opportunities.

Finally, morally and philosophically, how can we as a nation continue to give credence to our own values – democracy, prosperity, peace, good government – if we and our government take an attitude of denial and avoidance toward this critical issue? We can only take our values seriously to the extent that we truly face reality.

On behalf of the BCSEA, I thank you for the opportunity to submit our brief to the committee and to make this presentation. I would be glad to field questions.