



Pacific Institute
for Climate Solutions
Knowledge. Insight. Action.

PICS News Scan – 6 December 2011

Produced by [ISIS, Sauder School of Business, UBC](#)

Authors: [Neil Thomson](#), [Calyn Shaw](#), [Neil Salmond](#), [Kristina Welch](#)

Editors: [James Tansey](#), [Jessica Worsley](#)

The PICS News Scan is a weekly summary of the major climate-change related science, technology, and policy advances of direct relevance to the BC provincial and the Canadian federal governments and more generally to businesses and civil society. The News Scan focuses on cutting edge climate issues and solutions gathered by the fellows and faculty of [ISIS, a research centre at the Sauder School of Business](#), in partnership with the [Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions \(PICS\)](#). Access to some referenced articles may require a journal subscription or purchase of the article, and appropriate links are provided for this purpose. To be added to the News Scan distribution list or to provide content feedback and/or suggestions about interesting news items, please email picsscan@uvic.ca.

Complementing the News Scan is the [PICS Briefing Note Service](#). This service provides timely and concise analysis, as well as suggested policy action, on issues related broadly to BC climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Research Theme I: The low carbon emissions economy

COP 17 update and *Dispatches from Durban*

November 30, 2011. The [United Nations Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa \(COP 17\)](#) opened on Monday morning, 28 November. The early days of the COP involved agenda-setting and the formation of a number of contact groups to resolve the pressing issues facing this conference. On the wish list, UN officials hope for a decision on extending emission reduction commitments under the Kyoto accord, which has been postponed for two years. Previous commitments expire next year. Canada [announced yesterday](#) that it will not be signing on to a second phase of the Kyoto protocol, making it the only country in the world to have signed and ratified the international, legally binding agreement to tackle climate change, only to pull out later. Canada claims to be aligned with the US position that it makes no sense to have a binding climate pact if it does not include the world's major emitters. Many commentators have pointed out that Kyoto included a mechanism that would have seen those emitters join the protocol, although this provision was ignored in the announcement made by Minister of Environment Peter Kent.

The \$30-billion [Green Climate Fund](#) to help the developing world prepare for climate change will



be a hot topic at the conference and is part of a \$100-billion commitment made by developed countries at COP16 in December 2010. Funds are not expected to be available for distribution until 2020. Aside from the official negotiations, the [International Civil Aviation Organisation announced](#) that it plans to create a global carbon market for the airline industry next year. This is due to the EU's mandatory inclusion of foreign airlines in its cap and trade program, the EU ETS, starting next year. [The shipping industry](#) is currently discussing a similar, coordinated global action to avoid the EU carbon price. The International Institute for Sustainable Development is running a [daily blog of updates](#) from the conference, as is ISIS with its own [Dispatches from Durban](#).

<http://isis.sauder.ubc.ca/media/blog/>

Alberta's carbon-cutting programs failing, watchdog reports

November 23, 2011. A [new audit](#) of Alberta's greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction efforts shows the carbon-cutting practices in the province may not be as effective as touted by the government. The report, which found problems in a number of areas with regards to the measurement, reporting and verification of credits, comes at a crucial time for a province trying to convince the world that the tar sands are environmentally sustainable. The audit highlights two major issues with the accounting of emissions reductions in Alberta. First, referring to the agricultural "tillage credits", which represent more than 40 percent of the supply, the Auditor General's report said, "none of the evidence collected to verify individual offset claims was sufficient to prove" no-till or reduced-till farming because the protocol requirements are not specific enough. The second major problem relates to "fugitive emissions" from tailings ponds. According to the report, the province's three tar sands operators used three different methods to measure them.

A detailed discussion of the measurement shortcomings, including further discussion about tailings ponds emissions and tillage offsets, can be found beginning on page 17 of the Auditor General's report. The unverifiable emissions reporting and reductions in Alberta highlight the need for all jurisdictions to construct GHG reduction strategies that are [measureable, reportable and verifiable](#) (MRV). The international community is [still working towards global MRV standards](#) for emissions reductions, but new emerging strategies and practices show it is possible to create clear guidelines for emissions reductions that reflect a commitment to MRV. For example, California's Air Resource Board [recently released](#) a comprehensive summary of its proposed [Advanced Clean Car regulation package](#). Unlike Alberta's reduction efforts, the California plan reflects a clear understanding of the importance of MRV. British Columbia (BC) has not supported the creation of no-till offsets, but has committed to the creation of high quality forest carbon offset protocols.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/industry-news/energy-and-resources/albertas-carbon-cutting-programs-failing-watchdog-reports/article2246913/>

Majority in US support revenue-neutral carbon tax, survey says

November 22, 2011. Sixty-five percent of American voters would support a revenue-neutral carbon tax, according to a new survey conducted by Yale University. As long as the money was spent reducing income taxes, the carbon tax option received majority support from self-identified Republicans (51%), independents (69%) and Democrats (77%). If the funds were instead returned to all households as a cheque, or used to pay down national debt, support fell substantially. The support remained strong, however, even after respondents were reminded

that a carbon tax would likely lead to small increases in the cost of daily necessities. Another interesting result of the survey is that two-thirds of respondents thought the US should reduce its emissions regardless of actions taken by other countries. Fear of “going it alone” is a common excuse for limited political progress.

The direction of opinion in the US is often cited as justification for policies in BC (see, for example, recent [prevarication on cap and trade](#)), so this survey supports BC’s continuing commitment to the carbon tax. Australia also passed its carbon tax legislation last month with [strong emphasis on the balancing cuts](#) to household costs, and an international research team recently proposed that China [replace the country’s resource tax with a carbon tax](#). BC’s political leadership and the experience of BC businesses within such a policy regime means the province is well prepared for these global developments, and should stay the course from 2012 onwards.

http://e360.yale.edu/digest/majority_in_us_support_revenue-neutral_carbon_tax_survey_says/3222/

Research Theme II: Sustainable communities

Is sustainability science really a science?

November 23, 2011. Sustainability science is an emerging field of study that is becoming more mainstream and more entrenched in academia, according to a [new study from the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#). The study states that the concepts of sustainable development, which emerged in the 1980s, have developed in the last decade to become a cohesive body of scientific research and that the field has developed with a direct link to social policy and practice. Concepts of sustainability are now an integral part of the agenda of governments and corporations, and their goals have become central to the mission of research laboratories and universities worldwide.

The study evaluated the emergence of sustainability science in academia by mapping the number of publications and citations related to the field by geographical area. The study includes a [Google Earth graphic](#) plotting authors in the field by city. In terms of overall country data, Canada is average, but BC stands out as a major contributor to sustainability science. Unfortunately, neither the province nor any of BC’s major cities were acknowledged in the study’s discussion. According to the data, Vancouver can claim 322 authors, far ahead of Seattle and San Francisco, and half of Washington D.C. (the world leader). BC’s strong contribution to the emerging field of sustainability research is reflected by the work at the major universities, which includes the [Centre for Interactive Research on Sustainability](#) at UBC and the [Centre for Sustainable Community Development](#) at SFU.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/11/111123133628.htm>

Research Theme III: Resilient ecosystems

Climate sensitivity – the good, the bad, and the ugly

November 27, 2011. Recent [climate change modelling from Princeton University](#) suggests that while extreme temperature increases are unlikely, even small increases are likely to produce

significant climate change effects. The good news; the research finds 'low probabilities of very high values of climate sensitivity'. The bad news; the researchers also found low probabilities of very low values. Lastly, the ugly news; small temperature changes may cause significant climate change effects in the very near future. The research uses knowledge gleaned from previous glacial and inter-glacial periods, and suggests that sea level rises and dramatic landscape changes will result.

BC, with its diverse ecosystem, resource-based economy, and long coastline will be hard-hit by any climatic changes. The research suggests that BC must be prepared for inevitable change that will affect all areas of life and business. As such, the government is actively engaged in a [Climate Change Adaptation Program](#) aimed at addressing issues related to sea levels and changing temperatures, assessing risks and building knowledge. Regions across the province are also engaged in the [Regional Adaptive Collaborative Program](#) meant to address regional concerns and plan adaptive strategies for climate change. This story is brought to us courtesy of Skeptical Science, whose creator, John Cook, was recently invited by PICS to present his work at the University of Victoria. Cook's lecture is available for viewing on the [PICS website](#).

<http://www.skepticalscience.com/news.php?n=1140>

Research Theme IV: Social mobilization

People's showering habits revealed in survey

November 22, 2011. [According to a recent study conducted by Unilever](#), on average, British households have 8-minute showers - thus dispelling the myth that the best place to hide money from an Englishman is under the soap. 'Data loggers' recorded the showering habits of 100 households over 10 days, and found that the length of showers was longer than anticipated, consuming more energy and water, and almost as much as baths. Recommendations are that showers should be no more than five minutes and many companies offer timers to help households meet that target. Surprisingly, boys spent the longest in the shower, 10 minutes, dispelling the myth that girls are the shower hogs.

In British Columbia, [BC Hydro's Power Smart program offers timers](#) to help consumers reduce their time in the shower and [advocates for four minutes showers](#). Despite a seemingly abundant supply of water in the province, the impact and energy consumed both upstream and downstream of your bathroom shower is not insignificant. Cities must collect and treat all the grey water from homes, and many houses heat their water with natural gas or propane (location-dependent). Reducing showers to four minutes could reduce a [family's carbon footprint by up to one tonne](#) per year (assuming gas is the heating source).

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-15836433>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 Canada License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/ca/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.