



COLLABORATING ON A FUTURE ENVIRONMENTAL VISION FOR CANADA

Pollution Probe 50th Anniversary Conference Report



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Introduction

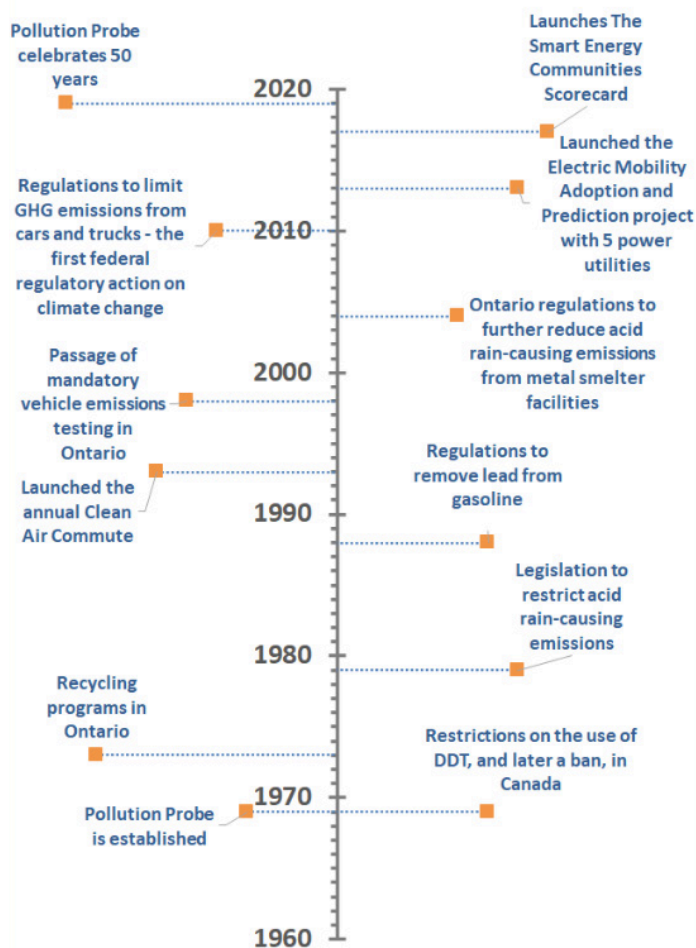
Pollution Probe is a Canadian charitable organization that operates as a leading agent of change at the intersection of communities, health, and environment. Since 1969, Pollution Probe has used research-based advocacy and partnership-building to promote understanding through education, and practical solutions through policy engagement. Through its actions, Pollution Probe has been instrumental in structuring Canada's most effective policies to protect human health and the natural environment.

Our Mission

We seek to improve the health and well-being of Canadians by advancing policy that achieves positive, tangible environmental change.

Our Vision

We aspire to be recognized as a leading source of information on environmental issues, to partner credibly with government and industry in developing environmental solutions, and to be a trusted voice on environmental policy.



Above: A timeline of some of Pollution Probe's achievements since its establishment.

About the Gala & Conference

Each year, Pollution Probe hosts a Gala which provides a space for diverse groups to come together for a mutually supportive exchange of ideas and perspectives. The 2019 Gala also celebrated Pollution Probe's 50th anniversary and its renewed commitment to serving as a leading voice for meaningful environmental action in Canada. For Probe, this Gala provided an opportunity to reflect upon the past, present, and future of our organization and the environmental causes we champion. A lot has changed since 1969, when the first Pollution Probers were grappling with explaining words like "pollution" and "environment" to an increasingly interested populace.

The 2019 Gala was preceded by a conference dedicated to planning for the next several decades of advancing real environmental change. Established and emerging environmental leaders from across the country were assembled at the conference and put to task on two desired outcomes: developing a vision for Canadian environmental stewardship out to 2050 and identifying key near-term actions that would support the fulfilment of that vision. To guide targeted discussions, the conference focused on four themes inspired by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals - **Energy & Transportation**, **Climate & Ecology**, **Circular Economy**, and **Society & Politics**.

2019 Gala Conference Panel

Energy & Transportation



Andrea Brecka
General Manager
Retail Canada,
Shell

Climate & Ecology



Blair Feltmate
Head of the Intact
Centre of Climate
Change Adaptation
University of
Waterloo

Circular Economy



Sarah Marshall
Director of
Sustainability
Nova Chemicals

Society & Politics



Autumn Peltier
Anishinabek
Nation Chief Water
Commissioner

Keynote Speaker



Mark Jaccard
Professor of
Sustainable Energy
Simon Fraser
University

At the conference, participants broke out into groups to discuss their aspirational long-term visions within each of the four themes, as well as the near-term (2020-2030) actions required to make those visions a reality. Following the keynote address by Professor Mark Jaccard of Simon Fraser University, introductory remarks were made from four speakers who set the scope for the four conference themes. Breakout groups then engaged in facilitated discussions in an attempt to leverage the collective knowledge and experience of the more than 130 assembled experts.

This report looks at what we heard at the conference and identifies a series of priorities for environmental action across Canada. As the conference was held in November 2019, and this report's recommendations were drafted pre-pandemic, it will be important to re-examine the content based on current realities.

What We Heard

Theme Summaries

These issues and approaches reflect the diverse opinions of the members of the environmental community that joined us at the conference.

1. Energy & Transportation

The energy and transportation theme relates to the use of energy commodities for transportation, space and water heating, electricity generation and industrial uses. Two of the largest sources of national GHG emissions are upstream oil and gas development and transportation, which collectively account for over half of total emissions.¹

The common areas of discussion centred around energy poverty access, transition to low-emissions energy sources, and shifting to modes of transport that are more environmentally friendly.



2. Climate & Ecology

The climate and ecology theme encompasses broad areas related to climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as enhanced conservation efforts. Conference dialogue narrowed in on more specific topics, such as flood protections, access to green spaces, and the implementation of green infrastructure to harmonize community planning with the natural environment.

Currently, communities across Canada face considerable economic challenges due to the effects of climate change, such as damage to housing and other infrastructure as a result of more frequent flooding. Modifying approaches to community planning are anticipated to have significant impacts, such as protecting biodiversity, flood prevention, improving air quality, and providing more equitable access to clean drinking water and green spaces.



¹Environment and Climate Change Canada, *Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators*, (Gatineau, QC: Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2020), pg. 7

3. Circular Economy

The circular economy theme focuses on the need to facilitate the transition from a linear “take-make-waste” economy to one that focuses on minimizing waste by ensuring materials and products are kept in use as long as possible, and shifting away from the production of those that are not easily reused, recycled, or recovered. Many of the recommendations addressed the effects of plastic pollution and indicated that Canada must change public behaviour and industry practices through multi-level government interventions and a variety of engagement initiatives.

More specifically, discussions on the circular economy included those related to the need to reduce the production of single-use plastics, continue education on sustainable consumption habits that are feasible for all Canadians, and improve recycling programs across the country. These discussions are critical as it is estimated that about 86% of Canada’s plastic waste ends up in landfill, with only a meagre 9% recycled.²



4. Society & Politics

The society and politics theme encompasses human rights, health, and education, as well as government policy at all levels. Wealthy nations like Canada have the capacity to prevent unnecessary loss of life, reduce human suffering, and limit economic disruption from climate change by implementing effective policies and ensuring that all Canadians have access to a healthy environment.

In order to promote a societal shift towards greener living, dialogues on society and politics necessitate educating the public as a key approach to fostering public engagement. This involves fostering eco-literacy in the next generation through changes in school curriculums, as well as assessing what changes can be made at the community, provincial, and national level to reduce Canada’s ecological footprint.



²Rachel Young, “Canada’s Plastic Problem: Sorting fact from fiction,” Oceana, October 25, 2019
<https://oceana.ca/en/blog/canadas-plastic-problem-sorting-fact-fiction>

Innovative Ideas

Low-Cost Public Transportation

A consistent element in conference discussions was the need for more accessible shared transport. Europe's free public transit movement is taking place in a number of cities, such as Dunkirk, France and Tallinn, and Estonia, with Luxembourg becoming the first country to adopt free transit nation-wide. This removes the barrier of affordability, while shifting away from car-dependant culture and reducing CO₂ and air pollutant emissions. It is no wonder that many felt that this was a good example to consider within the Canadian context. The extension of transit networks to rural and suburban communities that are currently car-dependent is another idea that resonated with participants.



Banning Developments on Floodplains

As many as one-third of Canadians are currently living in flood-prone areas, with only 6% being aware of it.^{3,4} Floodplains provide a much-needed buffer for protecting adjacent areas from flood in the face of heightened climatic variability. Natural buffers also help to prevent erosion and runoff, ensuring that the introduction of pollutants into water bodies is mitigated. Healthy floodplains are also key to conserving biodiversity and ecosystems. With significant development continuing to take place on flood-prone land, there is the potential for Canadians to suffer tremendous financial losses, with a huge proportion of this burden falling on homeowners.



³"Canada could avoid flood damage – if we had better flood maps," Globe and Mail, April 30, 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/article-canada-could-avoid-flood-damage-if-we-had-better-flood-maps/>

⁴Jason Thistlewaite et. al., "Canadian Voices on Changing Flood Risk," Interdisciplinary Centre for Climate Change, April 2017, https://uwaterloo.ca/partners-for-action/sites/ca.partners-for-action/files/uploads/files/canadian_voices_on_changing_flood_risk_fnl_0.pdf

Closing the Loop on Plastics

Plastic waste has become a key issue in Canada. One suggestion put forth to address this issue is to use non-recyclable plastic as a source of energy while we work to further eliminate plastic waste that ends up in landfills or the environment, eventually transitioning to cleaner forms of energy. Mandatory environmental product declarations (EPDs)⁵ could also be used to inform consumers and businesses about the lifecycle impacts that products and services have. EPDs could be applied to both finished products and their packaging and could eventually be used to ensure compliance with increasingly stringent regulations, (e.g., those that require the use of a certain percentage of recycled content in products and/or packaging).



Investing in the Next Generation

Many points raised in dialogues on society and politics focused on educating youth populations through changes to school curriculums or providing forums to capture youth perspectives. Ensuring that the next generation is climate-focused and climate-aware will help to foster a national environmental ethos that recognizes the importance of environmental stewardship. Establishing a structured national youth council to inform decision-making is one way to ensure that youth voices are heard and respected. It would also engage youth in being a part of implementing climate change solutions and starting sustainability-focused discussions at home.



²Rachel Young, "Canada's Plastic Problem: Sorting fact from fiction," Oceana, October 25, 2019, <https://oceana.ca/en/blog/canadas-plastic-problem-sorting-fact-fiction>

Recommendations

Energy & Transportation

Long-term goals on energy and transportation focus, not surprisingly, on decarbonization and energy access. The transportation and electricity generation sectors in particular are considered by many experts to be “low-hanging fruit” with regard to decarbonization. Viable alternatives to fossil fuels are now well-established in these areas and are becoming increasingly efficient and cost effective every year. We also need to consider other areas, such as heating and industrial processes, that could be harder to decarbonize. At the same time, we must ensure that decarbonization does not lead to energy poverty and that everyone can benefit.



The over-arching sentiment of the conference discussions on this theme can be summarized in two words: decarbonize everything. Electricity generation, all modes of transportation, and energy use in buildings and industry should be zero carbon or as close to zero carbon as technology allows by 2050. The decarbonization of transportation came up many times. Conference participants also reimagine public transportation as being accessible, affordable, and increasingly popular. By 2050, Canada should be a global leader on low-carbon freight transportation across all modes (i.e., on-road trucking, rail, marine and aviation).

While decarbonization is crucial, every Canadian should have access to reliable, affordable, and clean energy, and be able to take advantage of the shift to lower carbon energy sources. Increased energy literacy will be required as the shift to low-carbon energy sources accelerates. Many of the sustainability goals discussed at the Conference are people-centred and focus on the importance of educating and informing Canada’s population, especially youths. This is in line with a larger goal of educating the public to advocate for environmentally sound policies and decisions at a local level. Finding ways to shift mindsets on consumption and everyday living is key to popularizing “net-zero”⁶ lifestyles and organizations. One recommendation is to empower local solutions. For example, helping people and communities navigate away from the idea of large, detached housing developments to complete communities, which are those with essential services in close proximity, can cut travel times and facilitate the use of low-carbon modes of transport.

Near-Term Actions (2020-2030)

In order to achieve the 2050 goals, near-term actions focus on sustainable transportation planning, energy planning, and national strategy.

1. Sustainable transportation planning
 - a. Tax incentives for telecommuting
 - b. Incentives for using shared mobility
 - c. Electrify parts of the rail system and increase its share of passenger transport
 - d. Timelines for phasing-out new internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles and more support for low-emission vehicle adoption
 - e. Community planning incentives for transit, bike lanes, electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, etc.
2. Energy planning
 - a. Net zero new build homes
 - b. Net zero heating solutions including, potentially, the role of low-carbon gases
 - c. Net zero electricity generation

⁶ Referring to having an overall balance between emissions produced and emissions taken out of the atmosphere.

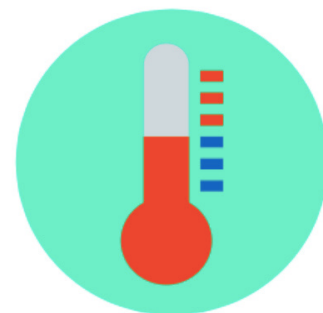
- d. Reducing energy poverty and increasing opportunities to participate in the shift to a low-carbon energy system
- e. Implementing local energy systems to benefit local communities and respect local choices

3. National strategy

- a. Interconnected programs to better deal with energy poverty
- b. Better data gathering and monitoring (i.e., detailed, Canada-specific lifecycle modeling across the energy and transportation sectors)
- c. Depoliticize carbon pricing
- d. Subsidies and rebates to encourage behavioural changes and establish norms that are environmentally conscious
- e. Support an energy information administration, and work towards harmonized global standards and practices

Climate & Ecology

Long-term goals concerning climate and ecology focus on adjusting human behaviours, so they are more harmonized with the natural environment, as well as enhancing the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystem health. The recommendations focus on conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation.



2050 Goals

Humans impact the natural environment in many ways, such as through GHG and other air pollutant emissions and deforestation. Many of these impacts not only affect the environment, but also community well-being (such as water pollution resulting in reduced access to clean water). In fact, due to the impacts of climate change there has already been an increase in the rate of climate refugees, also called 'environmental migrants', who flee due to poor or unmanageable conditions for ensuring their livelihood.

Protecting ecosystem integrity is a major focus in long-term conservation initiatives. Recommendations in this area include protecting biodiversity and freshwater, improving wastewater management practices, increasing the monitoring and management of ecosystem services, and fostering sustainable agricultural, forestry and mining industries.

Adaptation initiatives focus on increasing community resilience to climate-related shocks and impacts. Adaptation also involves enhanced community design, such as increasing green cover in cities or taking measures to protect the built environment from flooding (e.g., re-naturalizing flood-prone areas or limiting development within them). It also involves increasing climate change awareness as part of improving collective understanding.

Mitigation initiatives target the underlying causes of climate change and attempt to limit their impact. Climate change mitigation targets and measures overlap to a large degree with the visions and actions recommended for other conference themes. Like adaptation, mitigation is a cross-cutting area with a broad array of possible actions.



Near-Term Actions (2020-2030)

In order to achieve the 2050 climate and ecology goals, near-term actions focus on community planning, green development, and water protection.

1. Community Planning

- a. Implement community energy plans in municipalities
- b. Incentivize the development of green spaces (e.g., green roofs on buildings)
- c. Address social constructs that work against smart land use planning (e.g., need for large house and yard)
- d. Create buffer zones between built areas and floodplains
- e. Densify suburbs by promoting active mobility within cities as a core planning principle and developing multi-modal mobility hubs
- f. Ensure that urban planning incorporates the ability to live, work, and play in close proximity.

2. Green Development

- a. Provide up-to-date flood plain maps that are available to the public
- b. Incentivize and subsidize green developments
- c. Resolve conflicting stakeholder interests that delay and compromise the designation of protected areas
- d. Update or change building codes to mandate low impact development
- e. Reverse wetland loss by re-naturalizing these areas
- f. Ensure the inclusion of wildlife protections in development plans

3. Water Protection

- a. Ensure that all Canadians, including First Nations communities, have access to clean drinking water
- b. Implement policies to protect and restore freshwater (e.g., invest in technologies that can reduce marine debris, such as Seabins and LitterTraps)
- c. Introduce regulations for responsible water use (e.g., water taking permits should require environmental assessments)
- d. Find natural solutions for the treatment of stormwater
- e. Enhance the utilization and treatment of grey water

Circular Economy

An environmental vision for Canada entails a more thorough incorporation of the Three R's (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle). This phrase was actually developed in 1969 by Pollution Probe! The theme discussions focus on incorporating the Three R's in local and corporate practices, exploring applications of the fourth, more recent, R (Recovery), and ensuring national policies focus on 'closing the loop.'



2050 Goals

By 2050, there must be significant reductions in plastic consumption. This will necessitate increased investment in research and development (R&D) aimed at better understanding alternatives to plastics, as well as pushing for an overall decrease in the production of unnecessary single-use plastics. There may also be a need to promote the simplifying of packaging in a way that requires fewer types and/or decreased volumes of plastic. Perhaps most importantly, Canada must streamline its recycling efforts by reducing the use of non-recyclable plastics and the total number of plastics used commercially, while also promoting alternatives for end-of-life management.

Wherever possible, there should also be an emphasis on reuse. Conference participants recommended zero single-use by 2040 – stressing the need for cradle-to-cradle design and for consumer products to be recyclable, reusable, and produced through minimal carbon emissions. To this end, more R&D was recommended to better understand innovative ways to use non-recyclable plastic wastes for power and fuel.

Finally, Canada must develop national standards and enforceable recycling rates, taking into consideration environment-based targets and outcomes. One recommendation to facilitate the enacting of these standards is to create a Canadian circular economy hub that would provide oversight. The hub would also undertake actions that contribute to a circular economy such as providing the social, ethical, environmental, economic, legal and regulatory information necessary to support a successful transition. In the long-term, the hub could also lead efforts to streamline the number of consumer disposables and align recycling programs nationally. In addition to plastics, conference participants also noted that Canadians must work to further address waste, an issue which can have significant social impacts, and aim to increase the use of biomass and biogas as a fuel in energy-intensive industries (e.g., cement and steel) where possible.

Near-Term Actions (2020-2030)

In order to achieve the 2050 goals discussed, near-term actions must target both producers and consumers, facilitated by innovative policy led by all levels of government.

1. Targeting Producers

- a. Hold producers accountable for reducing their carbon footprint
- b. Require companies to release supply chain sustainability information
- c. Ensure that manufacturers are mandated to include EPDs
- d. Introduce GHG regulations targeting producers with enforceable rates by 2022 in an effort to reduce emissions
- e. Implement extended producer responsibility (EPR) for blue box programs

2. Targeting Consumers

- a. Change the “culture” to make it a consumer preference to choose recyclable or reusable products
- b. Ensure that sustainable products are attractive and accessible to consumers through subsidies or tax incentives
- c. Implement an environmental literacy program
- d. Introduce standardized product labels with environmental metrics or rankings to support the need for circularity

3. Government

- a. Ensure the harmonization and standardization of waste management programs and processes across all governments
- b. Support the improvement of the Canadian recycling and recovery industry (i.e., ensure that no waste can be shipped abroad)
- c. Ban organics from landfills
 - i. Invest in converting organic waste into energy and other commodities
 - ii. Make organic waste facilities cheaper, simpler, and more modular so they can be rolled out in more municipalities

Society & Politics

Goals related to society and politics focus on education and accountability. How can we provide the common knowledge and awareness to ensure that citizens support effective policy? How do we encourage accountability on the local, provincial, and national level?



2050 Goals

Education initiatives should focus on producing an educated and environmentally conscious corporate culture, consumer culture, and voter base. They should include the incorporation of concepts such as climate change, circular economy, and energy transition in curriculums, so such concepts are introduced to youth from a young age. However, all Canadians must be engaged on the implementation of environmentally sound policies. To ensure there is meaningful engagement across demographic lines, there must be a targeted focus on vulnerable populations. Inclusive engagement is critical to ensuring that the perspectives of vulnerable populations are factored into policy development. An example of an initiative that benefits vulnerable populations while benefiting the environment is the free transit movement, which was recently rolled out in Luxembourg. Here, public transit is funded in full by means other than imposing fares on passengers, such as tax revenues or commercial sponsorships.

Canada must also focus on increasing access to safe drinking water, particularly for First Nations communities – many of which are still dealing with decades-long boil-water advisories. Implementing a universal basic income should also be explored through feasibility studies and impact assessments. Consumers can also be educated on sustainable consumption through the improved labeling of products and services, such as through EPDs. Corporations and institutions must also be held accountable for their carbon footprint. One way to do this would be through the creation of a fact-checking database or scorecard that could make supply chains more transparent. This can be complemented with incentives for greener corporations and institutions, along with a higher carbon tax. Furthermore, there must be increased transparency and standardization in climate change and energy data, so it is more accessible to the general public, and to facilitate greater inter-jurisdictional collaboration.

Accountability goals also involve addressing the highly polarized nature of Canada's political culture to help ensure that non-partisan environmental policymaking can occur. Many participants felt that more power, funding, and decision-making authority needs to be given to municipalities. Ensuring that voters are socially aware and empowered will result in a democratic renewal that is integral to societal engagement. Educated voters are more likely to hold political leaders accountable for a lack of responsible action on environmental issues.

Near-Term Actions (2020-2030)

Near-term actions discussed in the context of the society and politics theme focused on efforts to improve consumer and corporate approaches to sustainability at the local and national level. The main focuses here are: education, engagement, and national strategy.

1. Education

- a. Foster a shared sense of urgency
- b. Build an “emotional tie” to the environment
- c. Implement an environmental and energy literacy program
- d. Require environmental labels on all products
- e. Establish a Pan-Canadian taskforce, coordinating with provinces and territories to identify mandatory climate change content in curriculums



2. Engagement

- a. Push for non-partisanship in environmental decision-making
- b. Engage Canadians on transitioning to a green economy through public commissions that emphasize how a greener economy can be more economically efficient, rather than induce economic hardship
- c. Establish youth councils
- d. Implement actions and programs aimed at vulnerable populations (i.e., climate refugees, low-income and First Nations populations)
- e. Improve voter turnout and voter interest in politics
- f. Build ecological partnerships with First Nations communities

3. National Strategy

- a. Be a leading voice for environmental reforms at the World Trade Organization (WTO)
- b. Explore the development of models that predict the numbers and destinations of climate refugees
- c. Implement immigration policies that help climate refugees
- d. Develop revenue tools to support environmentally conscious behaviours (i.e., congestion charges and parking levies to fund transit expansions)
- e. End long-term drinking water advisories on First Nations reservations.

Summary of Recommendations

Conference Theme	Primary 2050 Goal	Actions to help us get there
Energy and Transportation	Emissions-free transportation and energy systems by 2050	Accelerate the adoption of low-emission vehicles through actions such as purchase rebates, increased funding to public transit agencies, support for the installation of EV charging stations at publicly accessible locations, workplaces, and multi-unit residential buildings (MURBs)
		Leverage Canada's abundance of natural resources to achieve net zero energy nationally
		Make public transit and active transportation more viable mobility options by increasing accessibility, reliability, and safety
		Examine all options to decarbonize the high-emitting hard to decarbonize sectors, such as heating and industry
		Reduce energy poverty and increase opportunities for everyone to benefit from the shift to low-carbon energy sources
Climate and Ecology	Ensure that natural systems can contribute to climate change mitigation and that the built environment is well-adapted to increased weather and climatic variability	Municipal planning initiatives should prioritize: Community Energy Plans, incentives and targets for green spaces, the re-naturalization of riparian zones and vulnerable ecosystems, and the densification of suburbs
		Ensure that new development is sustainability-oriented through incentives, subsidies, updates to the national building code, more stringent measures to protect ecosystems and wildlife and minimum natural infrastructure requirements
		Re-naturalize wetlands, floodplains, shorelines, and reservoirs to prevent freshwater contamination and protect aquatic ecosystems
		Expand Canada's protected area networks by resolving conflicting stakeholder interests and prioritizing ecosystem services
		Preserve and enhance native biodiversity because it's the humane thing to do
Circular Economy	Incorporate the Four R's into local and corporate practices and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill	Streamline and harmonize recycling programs across the country, and implement extended producer responsibility (EPR)
		Focus on educating the public to reorient behaviours and lifestyles to encourage sustainable consumption
		Phase-in bans on organics in landfills while supporting localized organics treatment/handling facilities
		Reduce food waste and aim to increase the use of biomass and biogas as a fuel in energy-intensive industries
		Explore the requirement of environmental product declarations (EPDs) on consumer products Significantly reduce the production, sale and use of single-use plastics
Society and Politics	Increase environmental education and awareness in Canada so the public demands meaningful action from decision-makers	Address the highly partisan and polarized nature of environmental decision-making in Canada (perhaps through a scientific advisory council with veto powers over climate-related legislation)
		Ensure that First Nations communities are provided with the same fundamental rights and privileges that all Canadians should expect, including safe drinking water
		Ensure that vulnerable communities can participate in and benefit from sustainable development through subsidies and/or tax rebates that make low-carbon mobility and consumer products more affordable
		Updated school curriculums from provinces and territories to incorporate more climate change and environmental science content
		Establish a national youth climate council including representatives from Canada's provinces, territories, and First Nations communities
		Amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to extend refugee protections to climate migrants



Concluding Remarks and Next Steps

The recommendations in this report are broad actions levelled towards all members of Canada's environmental community to work collectively towards achieving a more sustainable future. Canada's pathway to a more sustainable future involves examining and implementing a range of key actions that address the four themes of this report: energy and transportation, climate and ecology, circular economy, and society and politics. There is an overwhelming consensus that 'society and politics' is the most underdeveloped of the themes and requires more action from the environmental community.

Pollution Probe has long been engaged as an agent of change on many of the recommended actions and will continue to press for sustainable solutions in these areas. We are currently developing programming to address some of the near-term priority actions identified at the conference. As always, we seek to build multi-stakeholder networks comparable to the one assembled at the conference when tackling complex environmental issues. Bringing together perspectives from civil society, government and industry and putting them to task on a challenging topic is perhaps not the most efficient way to get results, but it does yield results that are well-informed, viable and meaningful. It is the approach that we will continue to take at Pollution Probe, in recognition of the fact that everyone is a stakeholder with regard to the health of our planet.

Findings from our 50th anniversary Conference and Gala are also being incorporated into the agenda of our 2020 Conference and Gala. Thank you for your engagement and support. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you would like to get involved. We look forward to continuing our work on behalf of clean air, clean water, and a healthy planet for the next 50 years.



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