

About that Copenhagen award

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Back in December, during the Copenhagen negotiations, a group of environmentalists provided BC Premier Gordon Campbell with an award for climate leadership. Based primarily on the creation of a BC carbon tax two years ago, the Premier has gotten a lot of brownie points from the greens – in spite of the fact that there are some glaring contradictions between BC's transportation and industrial policies and climate policies, and that BC does not have a plan to achieve its legislated target of a 33% reduction in emissions by 2020 (relative to 2007 levels).

Those contradictions were highlighted by the approval the other day of a new EnCana natural gas facility in BC's Northeast that will add over 2 million tonnes of CO₂ per year to BC's inventory when fully built out. From the Tyee's [coverage](#):

The province's effort to curb greenhouse gas emissions is on course to suffer a 2.17 megatonne-per-year setback, after an environmental assessment (EA) certificate was approved for the \$800-million Cabin Gas Plant last Thursday (Jan. 28). The green light to the EnCana-led project signals the onset of a shale gas boom in the million-acre Horn River Basin north of Fort Nelson.

... The carbon dioxide implications get larger when considering the end uses of the gas. The initial volumes of gas produced daily at the plant would add up to 7.9 million tonnes of emissions each year when combusted. At full production, that downstream emissions rise to nearly 16 million tonnes — nearly 25 per cent of B.C. emissions, based on a 2007 baseline. Much of the gas will be exported to the United States.

Campbell's retort is that natural gas is "actually a bridging technology that allows us to move to the new cleaner energies." There is something to this argument, and it might even be true if we were able to guarantee that coal-fired power would be shut down in place of natural gas generated power. But no such guarantees are evident in this deal. All emissions will be additional to current emissions.

And not only that, the much-lauded carbon tax does not even apply to most of the emissions from oil and gas development, as it does not cover the flaring and venting of gas, or pipeline leaks.

This further goes to show that there is no political will in Canada to say no to the oil and gas industry. At some point we will have to confront the, er, inconvenient truth that the only bona fide sustainable path forward is to not get our energy out of the ground, or if we do to mandate that the emissions must be buried (sequestered) after combustion. That is, we need a moratorium on new oil and gas projects unless they implement carbon capture and storage (CCS).

So the question for my friends in the environmental movement: is now a good time to revoke that award to Premier Campbell, and replace it with one of the more notorious Copenhagen awards, the Fossil of the Day?