



NEWS RELEASE

Renowned energy expert says Ottawa's 'net-zero' emissions plan impractical and unrealistic

May 28, 2024

For Immediate Release

VANCOUVER—The global goal to achieve “net-zero” carbon emissions by 2050 is impractical and unrealistic, finds a new study published today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

“The plan to eliminate fossil fuels and achieve a net-zero economy faces formidable economic, political and practical challenges,” said Vaclav Smil, professor emeritus at the University of Manitoba and author of *Halfway Between Kyoto and 2050: Zero Carbon Is a Highly Unlikely Outcome*.

Canada is now also committed to this goal. In 2021, the federal government passed legislation mandating that the country will achieve “net-zero” emissions—that is, will either emit no greenhouse gas emissions or offset its emissions through other activities (e.g. tree planting)—by 2050.

Yet, despite international agreements and significant spending and regulations by governments worldwide, global dependence on fossil fuels has steadily increased over the past three decades. By 2023, global fossil fuel consumption was 55 per cent higher than in 1997 (when the Kyoto Protocol was adopted). And the share of fossil fuels in global energy consumption has only slightly decreased, dropping from 86 per cent in 1997 to 82 per cent in 2022 (the latest year of complete production data).

Widespread adoption of electric vehicles—also a key component of Ottawa’s net-zero plan—by 2040 will require more than 40 times more lithium and up to 25 times more cobalt, nickel and graphite worldwide (compared to 2020 levels). There are serious questions about the ability to achieve such increases in mineral and metal production.

Although the eventual cost of global decarbonization cannot be reliably quantified, achieving zero carbon by 2050 would require spending substantially higher than for any previous long-term peacetime commitments. Moreover, high-income countries (including Canada) are also expected to finance new energy infrastructure in low-income economies, further raising their decarbonization burdens.

Finally, achieving net-zero requires extensive and sustained global cooperation among countries—including China and India—that have varied levels of commitment to decarbonization.

“Policymakers must face reality—while ending our reliance on fossil fuels may be a desirable long-term goal, it cannot be accomplished quickly or inexpensively,” said Elmira Aliakbari, director of natural resource studies at the Fraser Institute.

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