

# Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians

A collection of texts in response to

*Acting on Climate Change:  
Solutions from Canadian Scholars*,

a consensus document released in March 2015



Faculty of  
Science



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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« À l'annonce de grands vents certains construisent des murs, d'autres des moulins. »

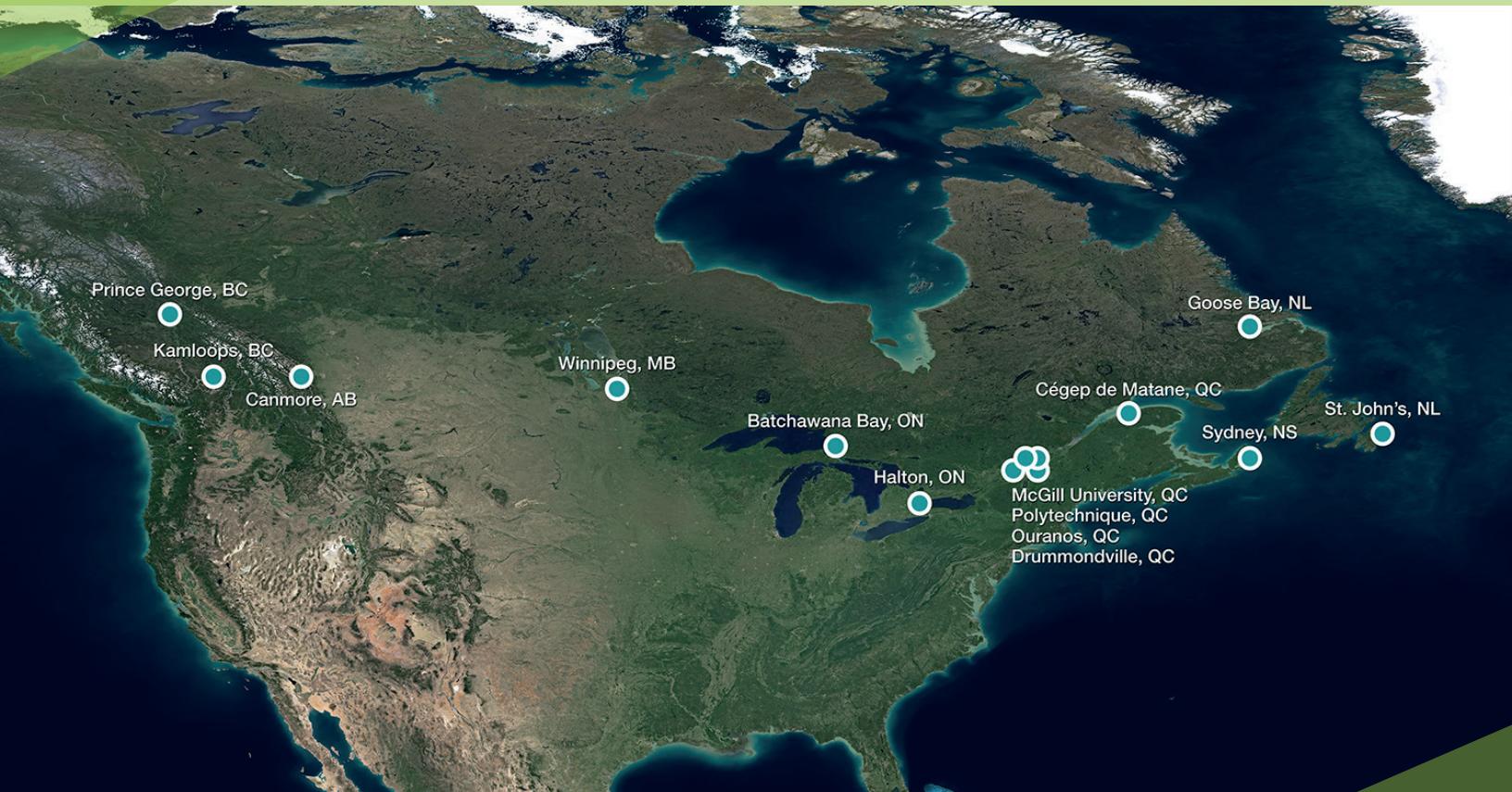
*"Upon hearing of high winds some people build walls, others windmills."<sup>1</sup>*

Since November 2013, Sustainable Canada Dialogues has built a network of 60+ scholars representing a broad knowledge base across the country. The network has proposed transition pathways to encourage Canada to act on its sustainability deficit<sup>2</sup> in relation to other developed countries that are taking leadership on responding to climate change and moving towards low-carbon futures.

Sustainable Canada Dialogues proposes that the long-term goal of helping Canada in a sustainable transformation must be pursued in the context of a long-term vision for the country; a vision that should be informed by the hopes people living in Canada have for the future. Therefore, the initiative adopts a twofold approach: sharing science-based sustainability solutions to contribute to the design of a low-carbon society, and fostering discussions across the country about the future.

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THE SCD VISIONING TEAM HELD 14 VISIONING WORKSHOPS  
BETWEEN MAY 2014 AND JANUARY 2015 TO FACILITATE DISCUSSION  
WITH CANADIANS ON THEIR IDEALS FOR CANADA'S FUTURE.



# Imagining Canada:

## An Exploration of Desired Futures

### From a Countrywide Visioning Approach

Here we present early results of visioning exercises carried out in the context of the second objective of Sustainable Canada Dialogues listed above. These results suggest that people hope for a future that is founded on an integrated approach to the wellbeing of society, the environment, and the economy – where the health of each contributes to that of the others.

#### Why a Canada-wide visioning approach?

Sustainable Canada Dialogues mobilized visioning to engage a wide variety of stakeholders from across geographies, sectors, and demographics in Canada to learn what people want for their futures, and to discover strategies for moving forward in a more sustainable way. This method is particularly effective for synthesizing individual aspirations into a common vision that articulates group consensus.

Visioning is a participatory research and engagement method geared towards collaborative future thinking. It is commonly

used to involve communities in planning and goal setting for the future of shared spaces through the development of vision statements<sup>3,4,5</sup>. Depending on the context, a range of different strategies can be employed. In many cases, visioning has been successful in helping communities to systematically consider and prepare for change, particularly in complex or controversial settings concerning issues of conservation, development, land and resources<sup>6</sup>. By encouraging cooperative and open dialogue, visioning is an empowering tool for stakeholders to inform decision-makers and planners of their values, particularly in contexts involving divergent interests<sup>7</sup>.

3 Shipley, R., Newkirk, R. (1998). Visioning: did anybody see where it came from? *Journal of Planning Literature*, 12(4): 407-416.

4 Hellings, A. (1998). Collaborative Visioning: Proceed With Caution! Results From Evaluating Atlanta's Vision 2020 Project. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 64(3): 335-349.

5 Shipley, R. (2002). Visioning in planning: is the practice based on sound theory? *Environment and Planning A*, 34: 7-22.

6 Evans, K., Velarde, S.J., Prieto, R., Rao, S.N., Sertzen, S., Dávila, K., Cronkleton P. and de Jong, W. (2006). Field guide to the future: Four ways for communities to think ahead. Bennett E. and Zurek M. (Eds.). Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), ASB, World Agroforestry Centre, Nairobi, pp. 87, <http://www.asb.cgiar.org/ma/scenarios>

7 Hopkins, L.D., Zapata, M. (2007). Engaging the Future: Forecasts, Scenarios, Plans, and Projects. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Mass, Cambridge.

1 Drummondville, QC session participant, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

2 Potvin, C. and Richards, N. (2015). Let's Talk: Opening the dialogue on our sustainable future. *Alternatives Journal*, 41(1): 16-19.

Between May 2014 and January 2015, the Sustainable Canada Dialogues team facilitated 14 visioning sessions from coast to coast with a wide range of people living in Canada. On average 15 to 20 participants per session engaged in daylong dialogues, where they were asked to consider the hopes they hold for the future. Throughout the course of each session, participants cooperatively worked towards articulating a communal narrative of an ideal future built upon the desires represented in their group. This contribution presents early analysis of some of the key common elements emerging from the visioning sessions.

### **The Sustainable Canada Dialogues visioning method**

A regional host was assigned to each visioning session to recruit participants from a range of community voices, reaching beyond academic and environmental or activist groups. For example, the group of participants

in Kamloops, B.C., included consultants, small business owners, workers in agriculture and mining sectors, local government representatives, as well as economic, environmental and community planners. Across the country a total of 173 participants engaged in the conversation. The methodology (Figure 1) was collaboratively developed in discussion with Sustainable Canada Dialogues scholars, and incorporated feedback from participants of the first pilot visioning session at McGill University in May 2014. Considering the diversity of communities involved, the methodology intentionally remained flexible in order to adapt to the needs of different groups and how they best approached the research question. The consensus statement articulated by participants was returned to each group after the session.

The visioning sessions are currently being transcribed and coded for analysis in order to identify prominent themes and ideas, and to identify notable differences across the

**Figure 1. Methodology employed to facilitate the Sustainable Canada Dialogues visioning sessions**

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<b>Step 1</b>	<i>Object narratives</i>	Share an object, photo or story representing a personal concern for the future.
<b>Step 2</b>	<i>Personal imagining</i>	Reflect individually on the future.
<b>Step 3</b>	<i>Look for commonalities</i>	Identify features common to the personal visions.
<b>Step 4</b>	<i>Discuss common features</i>	Discuss those features, consider important gaps and agree on a final representative list.
<b>Step 5</b>	<i>Compose the narrative</i>	Draft statements describing the future based on the previous characteristics.
<b>Step 6</b>	<i>Synthesize the narrative</i>	Share, combine and edit the statements into one narrative that represents the hopes of the group.

sessions<sup>8</sup>. To date, we have identified four prominent emerging themes: *community, shift toward renewables, "true democracy", and transformed mindset*<sup>9</sup>. Preliminary results were shared with all participants, who were also given the opportunity to comment on the findings.

### Exploring imagined futures

#### Community: Living together, working together, and celebrating diversity

Many participants identify a pervasive sense of loneliness and isolation that is built into the organization of Canadian society. To counter it, they believe we need a structural reformation of our communities in order to enable people to live together, work together, and celebrate diversity. *Living together* refers to the desire for more shared spaces, such as green areas and cultural or public activity centres; participants in Kamloops, B.C., use the phrase "belly to belly interaction"<sup>10</sup> to describe this theme. Creating better active transportation systems and cooperative or multi-generational housing would support interaction and familiarity between families and within communities. In many cases, *living together* also refers to the desire for human-environment interaction. Most participants show concern for the health of local and regional environments. For example, a participant in St. John's, Newfoundland, expresses the importance of interacting with healthy landscapes and seascapes for "human refreshment"<sup>11</sup>. Northern stakehol-

ders also express a particular emphasis on the land being a place "where the animals know they are valued" and "where people, animals, plants, and the environment thrive"<sup>12</sup>.

Communities *working together* are described as those in which individuals look out for the wellbeing of one another and take care of each other. This includes increased sharing between community members, and creative recycling and upcycling practices in order to work together towards zero-waste communities. Overwhelmingly, there is a strong desire to see a widely embraced shared social responsibility that shapes the way that individuals work, live, and act on a daily basis. Participants in Winnipeg, Manitoba communicate high hopes for the future health of their communities by suggesting that "social service case-loads [will be] almost non-existent because we [will] have learned to take care of each other within the community"<sup>13</sup>. In Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, this desire is defined as "[working] ourselves out of a job"<sup>14</sup>.

Discussions on *diversity* revolve around the reality that communities are places comprised of many different types of people. Often these differences create division; however, there is a strong appeal for communities to become inclusive places where differences can be safely shared and welcomed as points of pride. To illustrate, participants in Halton, Ontario use the phrase "unity without uniformity"<sup>15</sup> to express the belief that despite differences between people, it is possible to live together – even though we are not the

8 Data consist of participants' personal notes, the final vision statement and audio-recordings from each session.

9 Preliminary results are taken from the ongoing analysis. At the time this paper was written 7 of the 14 visioning sessions had been fully transcribed (Kamloops, BC; Canmore, AB; Winnipeg, MB; Halton, ON; Drummondville QC; Sydney, NS; St. John's, NL), involving 102 of the 173 who engaged in one of the sessions.

10 Participant notes, Kamloops, BC session, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014.

11 Participant notes, St. John's, NL session, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

12 See the Goose Bay, NL session vision statement at: <http://www.sustainablecanadadialogues.ca/en/scd/fostering-public-discussion-through/scd-visioning-workshops>

13 See the Winnipeg, MB session vision statement at: <http://www.sustainablecanadadialogues.ca/en/scd/fostering-public-discussion-through/scd-visioning-workshops>

14 Participant notes, Cape Breton, NS session, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

15 Participant notes, Halton, ON session, January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

same we are capable of working collectively towards common goals for the good of all.

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### Shift toward renewables

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Another strong emergent theme is the desire to transition away from a dependency on fossil fuels and towards the dominance of renewable energies. Participants call for abundant and diverse renewable energy options that contribute to the integrity of the natural environment, and for the provision of incentives to encourage efficient energy use. As articulated in the St. John's session, the phasing-in of renewable energies should involve "viable alternatives [to fossil fuels] which are tailored to local environments"<sup>16</sup>, allowing communities to develop according to their local or regional clean-energy strengths. Participants feel that government can be a decisive force in the successful phasing-out of fossil fuels, through the appropriate use of legislative guidelines to structure pro-sustainable options and choices. Additionally, the data indicate a general willingness to make sustainable lifestyle changes in response to effective government policies that would "level the playing field"<sup>17</sup>, as one Halton participant put it, by imposing penalties on non-conformers. The Halton group's vision suggests that an "Economic-Environmental Carbon Incentive Plan" that "rewards manufacturers for good environmental stewardship in the way they harvest and produce" could give a competitive market edge to sustainable producers by "equalizing the cost of goods"<sup>18</sup>. Participants believe that we already possess the necessary technology and know-how required to make the transition from fossil-fuel dependence to a society based on renewable resources. Most feel that

strategically redirecting government fossil fuel industry subsidies towards renewables is an important strategy for reducing and/or eliminating this dependence.

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### "True democracy"

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A critique of the current state of democracy in Canada is common to 11 of the 14 visioning sessions; about one third employ the terms "real" or "true democracy", used to juxtapose current practices that are often seen as undemocratic. Meaningful citizen engagement, which incorporates reciprocity between decision-makers and the public, is highly valued. People desire the space and agency to speak and to know that their voices are genuinely being taken into account. They would like to see politicians take seriously the role of representing the public will, in addition to creating effective measures for ensuring transparent decision-making and accountability to the public. Alongside meaningful reciprocity in this relationship, participants also aspire to be part of an informed, politically-engaged citizenry. In their consensus statement, participants in Kamloops envision voter-turnouts averaging over 75%<sup>19</sup>.

Results indicate a general lack of confidence in the first-past-the-post (FPP) system, accompanied by numerous requests for electoral reform towards increased public representation. In addition to not accurately reflecting the population politically, participants also critique FPP for inhibiting long-term coherence in decision-making. Specifically, participants express frustration at the inability to legislate positive environmental policies or lasting sustainable change that may carry short-term costs and is therefore damaging to electoral campaigns. Drummondville participants insist, « le

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<sup>16</sup> Participant notes, St. John's, NL session, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Participant notes, Halton, ON session, January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> See the Halton, ON session vision statement at: <http://www.sustainablecanadadialogues.ca/en/scd/fostering-public-discussion-through/scd-visioning-workshops>

<sup>19</sup> See the Kamloops, BC session vision statement at: <http://www.sustainablecanadadialogues.ca/en/scd/fostering-public-discussion-through/scd-visioning-workshops>

Canada doit avoir une vision pour diriger ses efforts au lieu de perdre ses énergies dans les politiques contradictoires »<sup>20</sup>. A long-term mandate based on the public will would contribute to circumventing short-term thinking by politicians concerned with re-election. Participants repeatedly suggest that greater public representation, increased transparency and accountability to citizens, and meaningful citizen engagement would encourage the government to make decisions based on long-term planning that is informed by and accountable to an involved public.

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#### Transformed mindset: reimagining society, environment and economy

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Participants repeatedly articulate the need for an overall transformation of the ways in which we understand the relationships between society, the environment, and our economy. They express strong desires to change indicators of progress away from the demand for continuous growth and consumption. Participants hope that this renewed understanding will lead to changes in how the economy functions, and how the environment is valued. Most participants articulate the need for economic reform where the economy becomes a tool to serve the wellbeing of society. One of the most notable recurring items in this theme is the need for a better work-life balance. Participants suggest that a society-serving economy is one driven by a diverse range of small, local enterprises, where local jobs are created through a value-added economy. Living wages are also highly prioritized, and, particularly in Canmore, Alberta, linked to the idea of "inclusive economies" where "everyone has the means to live well – not to live excessively – but [where] there is a base

level of standards of living" attainable by all<sup>21</sup>.

There is also a strong desire for a communal shift away from materialism and towards living more simply. While this idea may hint at an environmentalist bias, the concept is frequently used by individuals representing varying degrees of environmental interest or activism, and from a range of different living circumstances. In Drummondville, it is paired with the need to « faire la différence entre nos besoins et nos désirs, parce que nos besoins sont effectivement limités, mais nos désirs sont illimités »<sup>22</sup>. In Halton, it accompanies an appeal to transition away from our current "disposable philosophy" towards "quality manufacturing to increase the longevity of products"<sup>23</sup>. Many participants agree that re-evaluating the cost of goods so that prices reflect the social and environmental costs of production would encourage this transition away from the current narrative of disposability.

Indigenous participants from the Prince George, Goose Bay, Batchawana Bay, and Unama'ki/Cape Breton sessions express a strong desire to move away from the commodification of resources and profit-driven models towards more sustainable and small-scale development. One participant in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, articulates that in the ideal future "people are humble enough to acknowledge the rights of nature, and the responsibilities of humanity. This [leads] to a transformed mindset from exploiter to responsible"<sup>24</sup>.

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21 Participant notes, Canmore, AB session, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014.

22 Differentiate between our needs and our desires, because, our needs are actually limited, but our desires are not. – Participant notes, Drummondville, QC session, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

23 Participant notes, Halton, ON session, January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

24 Participant notes, Cape Breton, NS session, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

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20 Canada must have a vision to guide its efforts instead of wasting energy through contradictory policies – Participant notes, Drummondville, QC session, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

In Halton, participants generally believe:

"[e]conomics and environmental stewardship... are not in direct opposition. We can still be successful as a society – as individuals, as companies, as corporations, as manufacturers – without destroying the environment. It just means that we have to change the way we think. The mentality has to become one of stewardship – of society, of the environment, and it all ties economically"<sup>25</sup>.

Overwhelmingly, results indicate a widespread desire for the economy (including producer and consumer behaviours) to serve the goals of social and environmental wellbeing.

### Conclusion

The conversations that Sustainable Canada Dialogues has held across the country demonstrate that people living in Canada desire the opportunity to live well, and that this requires thinking beyond the economy to social and environmental dimensions of community wellbeing. A parallel look into past visioning work across Canada uncovers similar themes. In a review surveying 31 community visioning reports independent of Sustainable Canada Dialogues, ideals for the future of Canada emphasize community and other social features, followed by ecological then economic characteristics<sup>26</sup>. These visions express the desire for social features including community engagement and integration, safety, accessible shared public spaces and social inclusion. In the ecological dimension, high value is placed on the integrity and natural diversity of local landscapes in addition to having access to clean

water. There is also a widespread eagerness for more sustainable approaches to development and transportation in general. When asked to imagine the ideal future, people request that it be built upon a connected and engaged society, a flourishing natural environment, and a diverse and sustainable economy.

These findings resonate with the concept of regenerative sustainability<sup>27</sup>, an emerging idea adopted by Sustainable Canada Dialogues' *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* report, which emphasizes a positive approach to sustainability. Regenerative sustainability prioritizes social wellbeing alongside economic and ecological health, favouring environmentally sound solutions that improve people's welfare. This is well-illustrated by the issues surrounding urban transportation, which produces greenhouse gases, decreases air quality and causes traffic congestion. A regenerative sustainability approach would seek to improve quality of life while also addressing the economic and environmental issues in transportation.

We change the sustainability story from one of sacrifice to one of possibility when we invite people's diverse perspectives and experiences into the conversation of the ideal future. Rather than focusing on what we stand to lose through steps to mitigate climate change, we fix our sights on what we hope for the future and pursue pathways that bring us closer to those aspirations. Extending this dialogue creates an inclusive space where, despite our differences, people can cooperatively work towards the design of a future that is both desirable and ecologically, economically and socially sustainable<sup>28</sup>.

25 Participant notes, Halton, ON session, January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

26 Cameron, L. and Potvin, C. (2015). "Characterizing desired futures of Canadian communities." Honours thesis, McGill University.

27 Robinson, J. and Cole, R. (2015). Theoretical Underpinnings of Regenerative Sustainability. *Building Research and Information*, 43(2): 133-143.

28 Krauss, W. and von Storch, H. (2012). Post-Normal Practices Between Regional Climate Services and Local Knowledge. *Nature and Culture*, 7(2): 213-230.

In their engagement with decision-makers, Sustainable Canada Dialogues scholars learned that social acceptability of change is at the heart of decision-makers' concerns regarding sustainability and climate change mitigation efforts in Canada. However, feedback from the visioning suggests that people are encouraged by the process of dreaming and planning for possible futures. Many participating groups also acknowledge that, although sustainable transformation will come with costs, it can be brought about in ways that contribute to the social and

environmental wellbeing of all people living in Canada. This suggests that social resistance to change itself is not an obstacle to sustainability; rather, people are resistant to being left out of the discussion of what should change, how it should change, and planning for those changes. Meaningfully engaging the public would ensure that government-implemented change works in favour of the social, economic and environmental goals of society, consequently building social acceptability of those changes right into the design-process.

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## ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

# SUSTAINABLE CANADA DIALOGUES

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This contribution is part of a collection of texts, *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians*, stemming from interactions between Sustainable Canada Dialogues, an initiative of the UNESCO-McGill Chair for Dialogues on Sustainability, and business associations, First Nations, non-governmental organizations, labour groups, institutions, organizations and private citizens.

Sustainable Canada Dialogues is a voluntary initiative that mobilizes over 60 researchers from every province in Canada, representing disciplines across engineering, sciences and social sciences. We are motivated by a shared view that putting options on the table will stimulate action and is long overdue in Canada.

Together, the contributions enrich the scope of possible solutions and show that Canada is brimming with ideas, possibilities and the will to act. The views expressed in *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians* are those of the contributors, and are not necessarily endorsed by Sustainable Canada Dialogues.

We thank all contributors for engaging in this dialogue with us to help reach a collective vision of desired pathways to our futures.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT OUR WEBSITE

[sustainablecanadadialogues.ca/en/scd/acting-on-climate-change](http://sustainablecanadadialogues.ca/en/scd/acting-on-climate-change)