



### **Motion Regarding the Adoption of a Climate Change Policy**

Whereas, there is overwhelming scientific consensus on the urgency of climate change and the need to transition away from a fossil-fuel based economy and make broad systemic changes to society in order to avoid its worst impacts,<sup>1</sup>

Whereas, the effects of climate change will disproportionately affect populations that have the least responsibility and who have historically faced oppression, further exacerbating existing inequalities;<sup>2</sup>

Whereas, society's response has largely been one of apathy or inadequate response, institutions and individuals must advocate for and act on the changes needed for a timely transition away from fossil fuels and high-emission practices in order to minimize impacts;<sup>3</sup>

Whereas, SSMU passed a Sustainability Policy in March 2012 and updated it April 2013;

Whereas, the Sustainability Policy lacks depth in the area of climate justice;

Whereas SSMU's efforts to address climate change to date have been guided by the Sustainability Policy, the Equity Policy, and ad-hoc, short-term motions such as the Motion Regarding a Greener McGill, and the Motion Regarding Support for Indigenous Peoples and Allies.

Whereas, the VP (External Affairs) is mandated to bring a Climate Change Policy following the Motion Regarding Climate Justice at McGill, passed at the General Assembly in October 2014<sup>1</sup>;

Be it resolved, that the following policy be adopted as the Society's Climate Change Policy, in line with the vision and scope laid out in SSMU's Sustainability Policy.

Respectfully submitted,  
Amina Mousaqim-Barrette, VP External Affairs

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<sup>1</sup> Malte Meinshausen, Nicolai Meinshausen, William Hare, Sarah CB Raper, Katja Frieler, Reto Knutti, David J. Frame, and Myles R. Allen, "Greenhouse-gas emission targets for limiting global warming to 2 C." *Nature* 458, no. 7242 (2009): 1158-1162, <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v458/n7242/full/nature08017.html>.

<sup>2</sup> IPCC, 2014. "Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change." [Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri and L.A. Meyer (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 151 pp.

<sup>3</sup> IPCC, "Climate Change 2014."



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Claire Stewart-Kanigan, VP University Affairs  
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## SSMU Climate Policy

### 1. Context

#### 1.1 Climate Change

There is undeniable scientific evidence that climate change is urgent, and conservative recent estimates call for keeping at least 80% of our existing fossil fuel reserves in the ground in order to stay below the internationally agree-upon safe limit of a 2 degree Celsius increase in temperature.<sup>4</sup> A large-scale transition to renewable energy sources is eminently necessary for the future well-being of our society and our planet.<sup>5</sup> The science linking greenhouse gas emissions and global climate change is clear and well-established; we have been aware of the environmental and societal implications of burning fossil fuels for more than 20 years, but governments at all levels have failed to act in a manner commensurable with the crisis faced.<sup>6</sup>

#### 1.2 Climate Justice

The effects of climate change have and will continue to disproportionately affect populations that have the least responsibility and who have historically faced oppression from colonialism, capitalism and other power structures, further exacerbating existing inequalities. "Climate justice" has multiple definitions, but is generally understood to regard a struggle that aspires towards equality, human rights, collective results, and historical responsibility in relation to climate change. As conceived by Climate Justice Montreal:

*"Climate justice is a vision to dissolve and alleviate the unequal burdens created by climate change. As a form of environmental justice, climate justice promotes the creation of policies and projects that address climate change fairly, ensuring freedom from discrimination...and that recognizes that democratically deficient and inequitable models of governance and private power must be confronted in order to affect the type of change needed to avert catastrophic climate change."*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Meinshausen, "Greenhouse-gas emission targets."

<sup>5</sup> IPCC, "Climate Change 2014, Mitigation of Climate Change." *Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, 2014), <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg3/>.

<sup>6</sup> Rockström, Johan, Will Steffen, Kevin Noone, Åsa Persson, Stuart III Chapin, Eric Lambin, Timothy M. Lenton et al., (2009), "Planetary boundaries: Exploring the safe operating space for humanity." *Ecology & Society* 14, no. 2.

<sup>7</sup> "Climate Justice Montreal: An Introduction." (2010) Climate Justice Montreal. Accessible at: <https://climateactionmontreal.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/climatejusticepamphlet.pdf>



### 1.3 Fossil fuel companies perpetuate inequality

By continuing large-scale exploration and extraction, lobbying governments, and influencing the media, fossil fuel companies worldwide currently act as a barrier to action on climate change.<sup>8</sup> For example, the fossil fuel industry directly prevented the installation of stricter climate change policies in Canada at least twice in 2013 alone.<sup>9 10</sup> These efforts to prevent action on climate change and thus perpetuate inequality because of the disproportionate effects of climate on already marginalized populations. Furthermore, in Quebec and around the world, their activities have direct and detrimental local ecosystem and health effects on the communities close to extraction, often acting without their free, prior, and informed consent.<sup>11</sup> Overwhelmingly, these front-line communities are Indigenous to the land and the extraction conducted by fossil fuel companies, with the support of governments, are a form of continued modern-day colonialism.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.4 SSMU and Climate Action

SSMU is an organization with a long history of leadership on environmental stewardship and social justice. As stated in Preamble of the SSMU Constitution:

*VII. The Students' Society commits to demonstrating leadership in matters of human rights, social justice and environmental protection. The Society shall be mindful of the direct and indirect effects corporations, businesses and organizations have on their social, political, economic, and environmental surroundings.*

*VIII. The Students' Society commits itself to groups, programs and activities that are devoted to the well-being of a group disadvantaged because of irrelevant personal characteristics that include but are not limited to race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, gender identification, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or social class."*

Climate change stands at the intersection of environmental stewardship and social justice, and while the Society has made concrete steps towards climate justice in the past through work on fossil fuel divestment and climate policy advocacy, these efforts to date have been guided by

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<sup>8</sup> Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, (2010) "Defeating the merchants of doubt," *Nature* 465, no. 7299: 686-687.

<sup>9</sup> Shawn McCarthy, (Nov 8., 2013), "Oil Industry Successfully Lobbies Ottawa to Delay Climate Regulations, emails show." *Globe and Mail*, Available at: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/industry-news/energy-and-resources/oil-industry-successfully-lb>

<sup>10</sup> Max Paris, (Jan 9, 2013), "Energy industry letter suggested environmental law changes," *CBC News*, Available at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/energy-industry-letter-suggested-environmental-law-changes-1.1346258>

<sup>11</sup> James Anaya, "Extractive industries and Indigenous peoples: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples," *Report to the United Nations Human Rights Council A/HRC/24/41*, 2013, <http://unsr.jamesanaya.org/study/report-a-hrc-24-41-extractive-industries-and-Indigenous-peoples-report-of-the-special-rapporteur-on-the-rights-of-Indigenous-peoples>.



the Sustainability Policy, the Equity Policy, and ad-hoc, short-term motions such as the [Motion Regarding a Greener McGill](#), [Motion Regarding Support for Indigenous Peoples and Allies](#), and the [Motion Regarding Climate Justice at McGill](#).<sup>12</sup> This policy aims to give more comprehensive guidelines for the Society to contribute towards climate justice to the best of its ability.

## 2. Principles for Climate Justice

SSMU shall formally adopt a climate justice framework in its advocacy on climate change.

### 2.1 A just transition

In light of the context presented above, SSMU shall advocate for a timely transition away from fossil fuels with the goals of averting dangerous climate change and a more equitable society. SSMU shall root its climate initiatives in the recognition that the historical and ongoing burden of emissions is overwhelmingly carried by Global North countries like Canada, and it is these jurisdictions that must take responsibility, while peoples of the Global South are entitled to resources and technology to make a transition to a low-carbon economy on their own terms.

### 2.2 Anti-oppression

SSMU will also organize initiatives around the recognition that climate change, extraction, and environmental destruction disproportionately impact the most vulnerable groups in society. SSMU's commitment to creating a more sustainable planet also provides it with the responsibility to examine how all forms of oppression are interconnected and how they correspond to the degradation of the physical environment. Historically, the leadership of the mainstream environmental movement has tended to be mostly white, and mostly people of affluence. This leaves out the groups of people most affected by environmental degradation, namely the First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities whose land so-called Canada is built on, whose leadership in the struggle to create a more sustainable planet continues to be marginalized. Furthermore, racism, sexism, classism, transphobia, ableism and heterosexism are just as harmful to our human environment as is its physical degradation. Oppression separates us and prevents certain people's voices from being heard, ultimately limiting the scope of our victories in creating a more sustainable and just world.<sup>13</sup> SSMU shall strive to ensure diverse voices are included in campus climate initiatives, and provide workshops and other educational resources on the linkages between oppression and climate change.

### 2.3 Directly Affected Communities

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<sup>12</sup> SSMU Equity and Sustainability Policies available in the SSMU Policy Book, Accessible at: <http://ssmu.mcgill.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/SSMU-Policy-Book.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> This section on anti-oppression and climate work is adapted from the principles of the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition and the Student Environmental Action Network.



SSMU shall act in meaningful solidarity by striving to establish and maintain relationships with directly affected communities, taking their direction in determining solutions and sharing the burden of their struggle through support work that amplifies their message and empowers affected community within. SSMU shall also prioritize funding and other resources towards this aim.

### **3. Diversity of Tactics**

SSMU shall support a diversity of tactics needed to address climate change effectively and equitably, in line with the Principles in (2) and in recognition of the context presented in (1). Specifically, fossil fuel divestment, direct action, and education and capacity-building are three tactics that have already been identified by campus groups like Divest McGill, Q-PIRG, ECOLE and SSMU Envirocomm that SSMU shall work to support.

#### **3.1 Fossil Fuel Divestment**

Fossil fuel divestment has been the most visible tactic towards the goals of climate justice supported by SSMU prior to the installation of this policy. SSMU divested its fund from fossil fuels in 2013, and has actively supported the autonomous Divest McGill campaign<sup>14</sup> through funding, outreach assistance, space booking, and assistance as needed from the campaigns coordinators and VP External. This support of the campaign shall continue until the goal of the divestment of the endowment from companies that aid in the extraction or distribution of fossil fuel in a manner not commensurable with 80% of reserves remaining unextracted is achieved. SSMU shall also assist as needed to coordinate national initiatives between campus divestment campaigns.

#### **3.2 Direct Action**

SSMU shall prioritize funding for and publicly show support to student-run campaigns conducting direct action on climate that is in accordance with the above Principles laid out in (2) and the SSMU's Constitution and Equity Policy.

#### **3.3 Education and Capacity-building**

In line with the Principles laid out in (2), SSMU shall strive to foster a better awareness and capacity to act within the McGill community on the realities of climate change, the need for urgent action, and its intersections with struggles against racism, austerity, inequality, capitalism, sexism, extractivism and other social justice movements.

## **4. Position on Extractive Projects**

### **4.1 Advocacy**

SSMU will actively oppose and collaborate with other organizations to advocate against the development of all fossil fuel extraction or distribution projects that are not in line with the keeping 80% of fossil fuel reserves unextracted, (and/or) are being conducted without the free, prior, and informed consent of the Indigenous communities whose

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<sup>14</sup> More information on the Divest McGill campaign can be found at [www.divestmcgill.ca](http://www.divestmcgill.ca)



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lands they affect. This advocacy shall prioritize projects most local to Montreal but extend to others as possible.<sup>15</sup>

#### **4.2 Coalition ECO Participation**

Coalition Etudiant-e-s Contre les Oleoducs (Coalition ECO) is a network of Quebec student unions actively opposing the construction of tar sands/oilsands pipelines in the province.<sup>16</sup> SSMU was instrumental in the forming of this coalition and joined formally in October 2014. SSMU shall remain a member of the coalition and actively contribute towards its initiatives. Participation in the Coalition shall be overseen by the VP External Affairs.

#### **4.3. Fossil fuel company presence on campus**

As a result of their unique role in furthering climate change and perpetuating oppression of vulnerable populations through fossil fuel extraction's direct and indirect impacts, as detailed in section 1.3 of this policy, SSMU shall oppose any fossil-fuel company sponsored events in William Shatner building. It shall also condemn such events on rest of campus and strive to use any such occurrences as an opportunity for public outreach on the link between these companies and climate justice.

### **5. Support for Climate Justice Work**

In addition to support for the tactics laid out in section 3, SSMU will strive to support student initiatives that contribute to the Principles laid out in 2 and it will liaise with different groups to do so. SSMU shall also advocate for solutions to climate change in communities and at all governmental levels that contribute to climate justice as defined in section 1.3, and are in accordance with the Principles in section 2, for example community renewable energy projects; fair, ambitious, and binding carbon pricing systems; and initiatives contributing to more sustainable food systems.

#### **5.1 Vice President External**

The VP External shall work with other student unions and relevant community organizations to publicly call for political leaders at all levels to advocate for climate solutions as laid out in the Preamble to this section and in section 4.1. The VP External shall also manage financial, logistical and other resources to support student-run campaigns in line with the Principles set out in section 2.

#### **5.2 President**

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<sup>15</sup> For example, the Enbridge Line 9-B reversal project, TransCanada Energy East pipeline, Plan Nord, and oil exploration in Anticosti are all currently proposed projects that would facilitate increased extraction of fossil fuels and occur in or close to Montreal.

<sup>16</sup> Information about Coalition ECO can be found at [www.coalitioneco.org](http://www.coalitioneco.org)



The President shall advocate for these principles at Board of Governors where applicable, and continue to advocate for full divestment from fossil fuels to the Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility. They shall also work with the VP Clubs and Services towards a net zero carbon footprint for both the Shatner Building and SSMU's activities as laid out in the Sustainability Policy. They shall also support the VP (External Affairs) in their advocating against extractive industries and support towards a renewable energy economy.

### **5.3 Vice-President University Affairs**

The VP University Affairs shall advocate for increased research funding and intern opportunities in fields such as renewable energy that contribute to a just transition to a zero carbon future at Senate. They shall also advocate against fossil fuel company sponsored research and internships that hamper this goal.

### **5.4 Vice President Internal**

The VP Internal shall integrate outreach and education around climate justice into their events portfolio through speaker series, workshops. They shall also strive to use events as fundraising efforts for populations most impacted by climate change.

### **5.5. Vice President Finance and Operations**

With the Office of Sustainability's Sustainability Projects Fund and the SSMU's Green Fund, there are significant and clear opportunities for funding for climate initiatives that contribute to individual behaviour change, operations reform on campus, and education, but few that explicitly encourage projects working to advocate for fair, ambitious and binding climate policies at the extra-campus level, at the intersection of climate change and other movements working towards social justice, or for other systemic solutions addressing the root causes of climate change. The VP Finance and Operations shall strive to increase the funding available for such initiatives in efforts including but not limited to reforming the Green Fund terms to clearly support such work.

### **5.6 Vice President Clubs and Services**

The VP Clubs and Services shall provide resources and capacity-building opportunities to assist SSMU's clubs, services, and independent student groups in working towards climate justice. They shall also work with the President towards a net zero carbon footprint for both the Shatner building and SSMU's activities as laid out in the Sustainability Policy.