



Students' Society of McGill University
Association étudiante de l'Université McGill

Office of the Speaker
Bureau de Président du Conseil

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

Submitted For: October 15, 2015
Approved On: October 15, 2015

Whereas, the 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

Whereas, there is undeniable scientific evidence that climate change is urgent, and recent estimates call for keeping at least 80% of our existing fossil fuel reserves in the ground in order to stay below the internationally agreed upon safe limit of a 2 degree Celsius increase in temperature; ^[1]

Whereas, the SSMU has made concrete steps towards addressing climate change through our work on fossil fuel divestment and climate policy advocacy;

Whereas, the SSMU has made concrete steps towards addressing climate change, which have been guided by 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; ^[2]

Whereas, the Sustainability Policy and the Equity Policy both lack depth in the areas of climate change and climate justice;

Whereas, the VP External Affairs is mandated to bring a Climate Change Policy following the Motion Regarding Action on Climate Change passed at the General Assembly in October 2014;



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Be it resolved, that the following Climate Change Policy be adopted and remain in effect until October 15, 2020.

Moved by,

Emily Boytinck, VP External

Kareem Ibrahim, President

Adam Templer, Arts Representative to SSMU

Sean Taylor, Science Representative to SSMU

Erin Sobat, Senate Caucus Representative

Chelsea Kingzett, Environment Representative to SSMU

Eric Wiebe, Athletics Representative to SSMU

1. Scope

This policy shall apply to Directors, Councilors, Executive Officers, Senators, committee members, staff (employees), and all others involved in Society decision-making processes for the duration of their formal involvement with the Society. It shall be used as a guide for decision-making and a plan for taking action on climate change. This policy does not necessarily represent the views adopted by any faculty association, departmental association, or SSMU affiliated club, service, or independent student group.

2. Definitions

2.1 Global North The Global North refers to the 57 countries with high human development that have a Human Development Index above .8 as reported in the [United Nations Development Programme Report 2005](#). Most, but not all, of these countries are located in the Northern Hemisphere [3].

2.1 Global South The Global South refers to the countries of the rest of the world, most of which are located in the Southern Hemisphere. It includes both countries with medium human development (88 countries with an HDI less than .8 and greater than .5) and low human development (32 countries with an HDI of less than .5) [3].



2.3 Oil Sands Oil sand is a naturally occurring mixture of sand, clay or other minerals, water and bitumen, which is a heavy and extremely viscous oil that must be treated before it can be used by refineries to produce usable fuels such as gasoline and diesel [4].

2.4 Plan Nord The Plan Nord is a strategy launched by the [government of Quebec](#) in May 2011 to develop the natural resources extraction sector in the part of [Quebec](#) north of the 49th parallel [5].

3. Context

3.1 Climate Change Over 97% of actively publishing climate scientists agree that the primary cause of climate change is anthropogenic in nature[3]. In particular, the burning of fossil fuels and the subsequent increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations is responsible for the majority of observed warming for the last fifty years.[4] According to the fifth report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC), human caused climate change is likely responsible for the increase in frequency, duration, and intensity of droughts, heat waves, and tropical cyclones.[5] The World Health Organization suspects that over 150 000 additional deaths occur per year due to climate change, and that estimate is set to double by 2030.[6]

3.1.1 Sustainability and Climate Change The SSMU sustainability policy states that SSMU will strive to “actively promote practices that will lead to resilient ecosystems.” It further elaborates the SSMU’s commitment to reducing our contribution to fossil fuel extraction and greenhouse gas emissions.[7] Climate change affects the three major dimensions of sustainability: social, economic and environmental.[8] As a champion of sustainability, the SSMU has a responsibility to combat climate change.

3.1.2 Equity and Climate Change The SSMU equity policy commits to creating a functional anti-oppressive environment through the use of “proactive steps to challenge and acknowledge the current and historical processes” that further marginalize certain groups of people. Climate change disproportionately affects low-income people, people of colour and indigenous communities.[9] The relationship between climate change and equity is sometimes referred to as climate justice.

3.2 Climate Justice Across the world, the populations that have contributed the most to greenhouse gas emissions are the least likely to experience the worst impacts of



climate change.[10] The populations who will be hit the hardest, many of which are in the Global South, are also those who have historically faced oppression from colonialism 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.

3.3 Causes Climate change is undoubtedly caused by human activity, namely by greenhouse gas emissions, atmospheric aerosols, and land-use change.[11] Carbon emissions in particular can be attributed to both consumers and producers. In this policy, the SSMU will detail not only our commitment to reducing our consumptive impact, but also our dedication to challenging producers and the systems that allow them to function through the exploitation of natural resources.

3.3.1 Fossil Fuel Companies

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.^[12] For example, the fossil fuel industry directly prevented the installation of stricter climate change policies in Canada at least twice in 2013 alone.^{[13] [14]}

4. Framework

4.1 Principles for Advocacy The SSMU will formally adopt a framework of climate justice, in accordance with our values [2], based on anti-oppression. The SSMU will refer to the following framework when organizing around climate change:

a. Anti-oppression

The SSMU will organize initiatives around the recognition that climate change, extraction, and environmental destruction disproportionately impact the most vulnerable groups in society. The SSMU will strive to ensure diverse voices are included in environmental initiatives, and provide resources on the linkages between oppression and climate change.

b. Solidarity

The SSMU will act in meaningful solidarity by maintaining relationships with directly affected communities, with a particular emphasis on indigenous peoples. The SSMU will follow the leadership that indigenous communities have shown in relation to extractive projects such as the oil sands or the Plan Nord.



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4.2 Just Transition In light of the context and advocacy principles presented above, the SSMU will advocate for a timely transition away from fossil fuels with the goals of averting dangerous climate change and a striving for a more equitable society. The 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. The transition of the Global South towards a low-carbon economy should not be held to the same standards as the Global North, due to their constraints of development.

5. Operations

5.1 Business Partnerships The SSMU will, through purchasing and investment, support businesses that share our values and comply with provincial and federal environmental and labour laws.

5.1.1 Ethical Purchasing The SSMU will encourage the purchasing of products from companies that display a strong commitment to sustainability

5.1.2 Investment The SSMU will continue to avoid all investments in the fossil fuel industry and other sustainability screens outlined in the five-year ethical investment plan [2].

5.2 Carbon Footprint While recognizing and prioritizing the need for systemic action, the SSMU will strive to reduce our carbon footprint as reasonably possible and encourage the membership to do the same.

5.2.1 Transportation The SSMU will promote opportunities for collective transportation to meetings and assemblies and encourage the usage of train transport whenever possible.

5.2.2 Waste and Energy Reduction The SSMU will strive to minimize overall material consumption of the organization by investing in reusable supplies and to encourage waste diversion through compost and recycling. The SSMU will also periodically conduct research into potential energy reductions in the University Centre and present the findings of this research to the legislative council.



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6. Education

6.1 Research The SSMU will lobby the University for increased research funding and internship opportunities in fields such as renewable energy that contribute to a just transition to a zero carbon future. The SSMU will also support student run research opportunities that assist lobbying efforts as outlined in section 7.0.

6.2 Showcasing Solutions The SSMU will host or partner with events which aim to showcase the viability of alternative energy and job opportunities within the renewable energy sector.

6.3 Support for Applied Student Research The SSMU will seek to partner with on campus organizations that support applied student research in climate change initiatives such as the McGill Office of Sustainability.

6.4 Capacity Building In line with the framework laid out in section 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 and other social justice movements.

7. Advocacy and Mobilization

7.1 Advocacy The SSMU will advocate for keeping 80% of fossil fuel reserves in the ground. The SSMU will actively oppose fossil fuel extraction or distribution projects that are being conducted without the free, prior, and informed consent of the indigenous communities whose lands they affect.

7.1.2 Lobbying Efforts The SSMU will advocate for solutions to climate change in communities and at all governmental levels, for example community renewable energy projects; fair, ambitious, and binding carbon pricing systems; and initiatives contributing to more sustainable food systems. This may be done independently or in conjunction with a provincial student federation.

7.2 Mobilization SSMU shall support a diversity of tactics needed to address climate change effectively and equitably, in line with the framework in section 2 and in recognition of the context presented in section 1.



7.2.1 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 funds from fossil fuels in 2013, and has actively supported the autonomous Divest McGill campaign^[16] through funding, outreach assistance, space booking, and assistance as needed from the Campaigns Coordinators and VP External. SSMU shall also assist as needed to coordinate national initiatives between campus divestment campaigns.

7.2.2 Coalition ÉCO Participation

Coalition Étudiant-e-s Contre les Oléoducs (Coalition ÉCO/ Students against pipelines) is a network of Quebec student unions actively opposing the construction of oil pipelines in the province.^[17] 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.

[1] Meinshausen, Malte, 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."

[2] 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>

[3] Damerow, Harold. "Global South." *Global South*. August 27, 2010. Accessed October 13, 2015.

[4] "What Is Oil Sands?" *Alberta Energy*.. Accessed October 13, 2015.

[5] "Plan Nord." *Plan Nord*. Accessed October 13, 2015.

[6] Cook, John, Dana Nuccitelli, Sarah A. Green, Mark Richardson, Bärbel Winkler, Rob Painting, Robert Way, Peter Jacobs, and Andrew Skuce. "Quantifying the consensus on anthropogenic global warming in the scientific literature." *Environmental Research Letters* 8, no. 2 (2013): 024024.

[7] Oreskes, Naomi. "The scientific consensus on climate change." *Science* 306, no. 5702 (2004): 1686-1686.



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[8] Field, C.B., V.R. Barros, D.J. Dokken, K.J. Mach, M.D. Mastrandrea, T.E. Bilir, M. Chatterjee, K.L. Ebi, Y.O. Estrada, R.C. Genova, B. Girma, E.S. Kissel, A.N. Levy, S. MacCracken, P.R. Mastrandrea, and L.L. White (eds.). "Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change." Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA (2014)

[9] "Climate Change." World Health Organization. 2015. Accessed September 23, 2015. Available at: <http://www.who.int/heli/risks/climate/climatechange/en/>

[10] 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>

[11] Field, C.B., V.R. Barros, D.J. Dokken, K.J. Mach, M.D. Mastrandrea, T.E. Bilir, M. Chatterjee, K.L. Ebi, Y.O. Estrada, R.C. Genova, B. Girma, E.S. Kissel, A.N. Levy, S. MacCracken, P.R. Mastrandrea, and L.L. White (eds.). "Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change." Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA (2014)

[12] "A Climate of Change: African Americans, Global Warming, and a Just Climate Policy in the U.S." Climate Access. Accessed September 23, 2015. <http://www.climateaccess.org/resource/climate-change-african-americans-global-warming-and-just-climate-policy-us>.

[13] Samson, J., D. Berteaux, B. J. McGill, and M. M. Humphries. "Geographic disparities and moral hazards in the predicted impacts of climate change on human populations." *Global Ecology and Biogeography* 20, no. 4 (2011): 532-544.

[14] "Causes of Climate Change." World Meteorological Organization. Accessed September 23, 2015. https://www.wmo.int/pages/themes/climate/causes_of_climate_change.php

[15] Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. "Defeating the merchants of doubt." *Nature* 465, no. 7299 (2010): 686-687.

[16] 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>



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[17] 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>

[18] 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>.

[19] More information on the Divest McGill campaign can be found at www.divestmcgill.ca

[20] Information about Coalition ECO can be found at www.coalitioneco.org

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Appendix A: Climate Change Resources

To learn more about climate change:

1. The Science of Climate Change: The NASA website provides comprehensive information about climate science. <http://climate.nasa.gov/>
2. Climate Change and the World: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provides updates on the latest scientific and policy research, periodically creating very comprehensive reports. <http://www.ipcc.ch/>
3. Climate Justice: The Mary Robinson Foundation provides information on climate justice and the unequal burden of climate change. <http://www.mrfcj.org/>

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