



Cumulative Impact Assessment

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Abstract: Canada remains a major consumer, producer, and exporter of energy, and, at this same time, is experiencing greater impacts from climate change than most other industrialized nations. Attention is on the large magnitude changes in climate in Canada's North, as well as recent changes in governance towards more local autonomy. Economic development is being hastened by reductions in ice cover, increasing the need for better impact assessment in the relatively sensitive Arctic systems. Canada also wants to be seen as a leader in environmental management to shore up its claims to northern territories.

Even with these strong driving forces, impact assessment in Canada remains focused on impacts of the environment on the project and greenhouse gas emissions. Although climate change was described as the largest cumulative impact experienced to date in Calgary IAIA 2008, cumulative impact assessment is rarely used to evaluate it. Barriers in a range of jurisdictions across Canada's North are examined to identify common elements. Key questions are: Who should be leading? What are the major barriers to moving forward? What are the costs of not moving forward fast enough? Can cumulative assessment be used as a bridge?

Canada is in a position to contribute positively to development of the impact assessment process and stands to benefit from orderly development of valuable resources in the North. Politics is a part of the story but the costs of not investing in adequate research and development for environmental protection are high.

Summary: Canada remains a major consumer, producer, and exporter of energy and is experiencing greater impacts from climate change than most other industrialized nations. Yet impact assessment in Canada remains focused on environmental impacts concerning project and greenhouse gas emissions. The costs of inadequate environmental protection in the North are high.