

[Stephen Leahy, International Environmental Journalist](#)

Discovering Global Environmental Interconnections

Canada's Idea of Working on Climate Change Means Muzzling Climate Scientists, Closing Research Stations and Cutting Funding

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By Stephen Leahy

UXBRIDGE, Canada, Mar 16, 2010 (IPS)

Canada's climate researchers are being muzzled, their funding slashed, research stations closed, findings ignored and advice on the critical issue of the century unsought by Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government, according to a 40-page report by a coalition of 60 non-governmental organisations.

"This government says they take climate change seriously but they do nothing and try to hide the truth about climate change," said Graham Saul, representing Climate Action Network Canada (CAN), which produced the report "[Troubling Evidence](#)".

"We want Canadians to understand what's going on with this government," Saul told IPS.

Climate change is not an abstract concept. It already results in the deaths of 300,000 people a year, virtually all in the world's poorest countries. Some 325 million people are being seriously affected, with economic losses averaging 125 billion dollars a year, according to "[The Anatomy of a Silent Crisis](#)", the first detailed look at climate change and the human impacts.

Released last fall by the Geneva-based Global Humanitarian Forum, the report notes that these deaths and losses are not just from the rise in severe weather events but mainly from the gradual environmental degradation due to climate change.

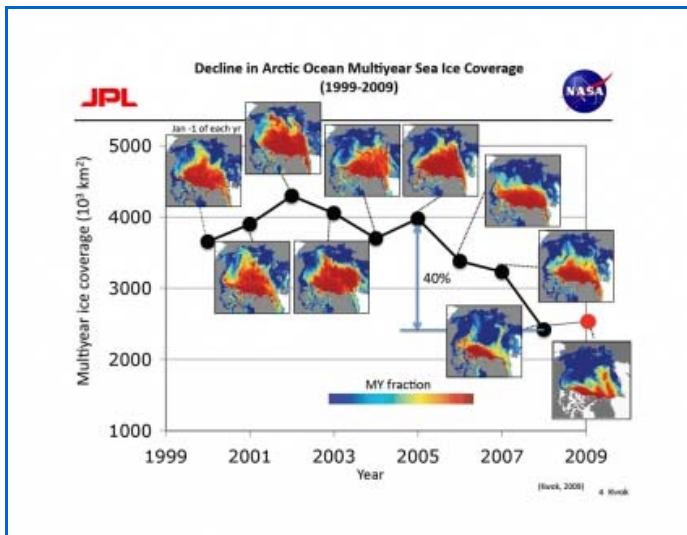
"People everywhere deserve to have leaders who find the courage to achieve a solution to this crisis," writes Kofi Annan, former U.N. secretary-general and president of the Forum, in the report.

Canadians are unlikely to know any of this.

"Media coverage of climate change science, our most high-profile issue, has been reduced by over 80 percent," says internal government documents obtained by Climate Action Network.

The dramatic decline results from a 2007 Harper government-imposed prohibition on government scientists speaking to reporters. Canadian scientists have told IPS they required permission from the prime minister's communications office to comment on their own studies made public in scientific journals and reports.

If permission is granted, it requires written questions submitted in advance and often replies by scientists have to go through a vetting process. Within six months, reporters stopped calling and media coverage declined, the leaked report noted.



While climate experts were being muzzled, known climate change deniers were put in key positions on scientific funding bodies says Saul. The report documents three appointments and their public statements that climate change is a myth or exaggerated.

“The climate-change issue is somewhat sensational and definitely exaggerated,” said economist Mark Mullins, former executive director of a free-market think tank called the Fraser Institute in 2007, according to the report.

The Fraser Institute has often cast doubt on seriousness of climate change. In 2009, Mullins was appointed to the board of the major government funder the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC).

Mullins is in good company. In late February, Maxime Bernier, a senior member of the Harper government and a former Foreign Affairs cabinet minister, published a letter in a major newspaper saying there was no scientific consensus on climate change and that the world’s national academies of science were exaggerating.

“The alarmism that has often characterised this issue is no longer valid. Canada is right to be prudent,” he wrote.

Bernier is considered a possible successor to Stephen Harper.

Last week, scientists who study climate change from a remote polar science research base on Ellesmere Island said they have run out of funding and will shut down this year.

Earlier this month, the new federal budget failed to provide any funding for Canada’s main climate science initiative, the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmosphere Sciences. Funding everything from global climate models, to the melting of polar ice and frequency of Arctic storms, to droughts and water supply, the foundation will run out of cash early next year.



“Their (federal government) actions make it clear they don’t care about climate change,” said Andrew Weaver, a climate scientist at the University of Victoria.

“This administration is a very different form of government. It is top-down, and run by a small group who are anti-science,” Weaver told IPS.

Previous governments have always consulted with scientists prior to funding and policy decisions related to science, but the current government does not even consult its own scientists, he said. "They are only interested in issues on their agenda: oil and related industries," he said.

Last October, Prime Minister Harper announced a 1.6-billion-dollar, multi-year partnership with the oil industry to reduce emissions from Canada's tar sands oil projects, saying: "We are taking real action at home and on the world stage to produce real, tangible reductions in greenhouse gas emissions."

The tar sands, located mainly in the province of Alberta, produce 1.3 million barrels of oil a day, almost all for the U.S. market. The massive project is the single biggest source of greenhouse gases in Canada, has the biggest toxic tailing ponds covering 50 square kilometres, and a much longer list of staggering environmental impacts.

This "real action" promised by Harper is to invest in an unproven, risky and expensive long shot called "carbon capture and sequestration" that is at least a decade away. Even if this new technology can be developed and works as planned, Canada's carbon emissions would be reduced far faster, easier and more reliably by improving energy efficiency, experts say.

Spending 1.6 billion dollars to replace old refrigerators with high-efficiency ones in the average Canadian home brings higher emissions reductions than carbon capture and sequestration in the tar sands ever will, according to information provided by the Pembina Institute, an Alberta NGO.

"Almost all of the money this government claims is climate change work is about getting more oil out of the ground," said John Bennett, executive director of the Sierra Club Canada.

"Canadian climate science is falling behind and the world is not getting information about what is happening in the Canadian Arctic," Bennett said in an interview.

The Harper government sees climate change as a communications problem and is eliminating government-funded climate research so there won't be any "bad news" about what is happening, he said.

"This government is doing nothing on climate but they always make sure to sound like they're doing something to fool Canadians," Bennett said.

via [CLIMATE CHANGE: In Canada, No News is Bad News](#)

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Written by Stephen

March 16, 2010 at 2:34 pm

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Thanks for this! One small note— Andrew Weaver is a climate scientists and not a climatologist.

Other than that you hit the nail on the head.



MapleLeaf

March 16, 2010 at [5:12 pm](#)

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[Stephen](#)

March 16, 2010 at [5:49 pm](#)

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